

Academic Adjustment of Chinese Students at German Universities

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Abstract

Student mobility stimulates the research on exploring international students' learning experience abroad. Different from other sojourners (expatriates, diplomats, volunteers, aid workers, etc.), student sojourners' identities draw researcher's attention to their learning experience at the host country. Although Chinese students are the largest international student group in Germany, still a small number of studies have sought to understand the academic adjustment of Chinese students in German higher education institutions. Against this background, this research employs a mixed research method (interview and questionnaire), aiming at probing Chinese student's academic adjustment at German universities. Inspired by Anderson's cognitive, affective, and behavioral model, this research explores Chinese students' academic adjustment in four phases: pre-departure, initial, developing, and final phase.

This research is composed of three studies. Study 1 is a cross-sectional study which interviews 18 Chinese students from different subjects, pursuing different academic degrees, and spending different lengths of time in Germany. Study 2 is a case study conducted in a social science faculty and both German lecturers' observation on Chinese students' academic adjustment and Chinese students' opinions are investigated; and Study 3 is a longitudinal research study, which follows Chinese students' language development and learning experiences at German universities.

This research finds that a good preparation in the pre-departure phase facilitates Chinese students' academic adjustment in the initial period. The results reveal that the majority of Chinese students, except for learning the German language (attending training and tests) and general "survival" or daily life-oriented information (weather, food, traffic, etc.), have relative little knowledge about Germany (German culture, history, and customs) and the academic-oriented information (types of courses, academic tasks, assessment methods, etc.), as they only leave a short period of time to prepare to study in Germany.

Such an underprepared state directly leads to the "hard landing" in the initial phase, as Chinese students encounter much difficulty arriving in Germany. The first semester was perceived by many interviewees as a "catastrophe" or "chaos", as they are not familiar with the academic-oriented information in Germany at all. Facing such difficulty, they feel "at a loss"; at the same time, Chinese students feel misunderstood, when they find that their lecturers don't show understanding to their identity as foreign students. Furthermore, as newcomers, Chinese students are not familiar with the academic support system; they can only rely on themselves or co-national Chinese friends to deal with the problems.

In the developing phase, Chinese students reported progress in German language and knowledge about German universities (types of the courses, academic tasks, assessment methods, etc.). Both these two factors facilitated their further development. One of the challenges in the developing phase is negotiating the differences between their Chinese educational tradition and the current academic expectations at German universities. It is frustrating for Chinese students to find what they once regard correctly in the Chinese learning environment turning out to be wrong or unexpected in the German one. Since they are more familiar with the academic support system at German universities, they try to ask lecturers, tutors, fellow students to solve their problems.

In the final phase, Chinese students show understanding and appreciation of the expectations at German universities. For instance, in the initial phase, Chinese students often complain “nobody takes care of me” and report great difficulty in participating in seminars (either participating in the discussion or giving a presentation). However, in the final phase, they regard such “nobody takes care of me” as “academic freedom”, and show appreciation to the seminar and regard it as an active type of course at German universities. The whole process of academic adjustment expects Chinese students to identify the difference, understand the difference, and later appreciate the difference.

This research further finds that throughout the above process learning at German universities, background (German language competence in academic knowledge), situational (academic support, student identity, and intercultural communication with peer students), and personal factors (personality, personal effort, and part-time job) together exert influence on the Chinese students’ academic adjustment at German universities. In order to improve the academic adjustment, suggestions are made to the prospective Chinese students and German institutions to better facilitate Chinese students’ academic adjustment in Germany.

Keywords: Chinese overseas students, academic adjustment, higher education, German universities

Zusammenfassung

Die weltweit gestiegene Mobilität von Studierenden hat die Forschung zu den Lernerfahrungen internationaler Studierender in erheblichem Maße stimuliert. Im Unterschied zu anderen Formen des Auslandsaufenthalts (Expatriats, Diplomaten, Freiwillige, Entwicklungshelfer...) hat die Frage der Identitätsbildung bei Studierenden mit Auslandsaufenthalten das Interesse der Forscher auf sich gezogen, speziell mit Blick auf die Lernerfahrung in den Gastländern. Obwohl chinesische Studierende die größte Gruppe der Auslandsstudierenden in Deutschland stellen, gibt es nur eine geringe Zahl an Untersuchungen zur Frage der akademischen Anpassung (academic adjustment) an deutschen Hochschuleinrichtungen. Vor diesem Hintergrund greift diese Untersuchung auf einen Methodenmix (Interview und Fragebogen) zurück, um die akademische Anpassung chinesischer Studierender an deutschen Hochschulen zu untersuchen. Inspiriert durch das kognitive, affektive und verhaltensorientierte Modell von Anderson untersucht diese Forschungsarbeit die akademische Anpassung chinesischer Studierender in vier Phasen: Vor-Ausreise, Initialphase nach Einreise, Entwicklungsphase und Abschlussphase.

Die Untersuchung umfasst drei Teilstudien: Studie 1 ist interdisziplinär und beinhaltet Interviews mit 18 chinesischen Studierenden aus unterschiedlichen Fachbereichen, jeweils mit unterschiedlichen Abschlusszielen und variierender Aufenthaltsdauer. Studie 2 stellt eine Fallstudie zu einer sozialwissenschaftlichen Fakultät dar, bei der sowohl die Beobachtungen deutscher Lehrender als auch die Meinungen chinesischer Studierender untersucht werden. Studie 3 ist eine longitudinale Untersuchung, die die sprachliche Entwicklung und Lernerfahrungen chinesischer Studierender nachzeichnet.

Die Untersuchung hat ergeben, dass eine gute Vorbereitung in der Vor-Ausreise Phase die akademische Anpassung der chinesischen Studierenden in der Initialphase erleichtert. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass die Mehrheit der chinesischen Studierenden, abgesehen von Sprachvorbereitungen (Besuch von Vorbereitungsmaßnahmen, Ablegen von Tests) und allgemeinen Überlebens- und Alltagsinformationen (Wetter, Nahrung, Verkehr...) vergleichsweise geringe Kenntnisse über Deutschland (deutsche Kultur, Geschichte, Sitten und Gebräuche) und speziell über die Studienorganisation (Veranstaltungsarten, wissenschaftlicher Anspruch, Bewertungsmaßstäbe und –methoden) besitzen. In erster Linie ist dies eine Folge der geringen Vorbereitungszeit auf den Studienaufenthalt in Deutschland.

Diese Situation, relativ unvorbereitet zu sein, führt in der Initialphase direkt zur „harten Landung“, da chinesische Studierende nach ihrer Ankunft in Deutschland auf zahlreiche Probleme stoßen. Das erste Semester wurde von vielen Interviewpartnern als Katastrophe oder Chaos bezeichnet, da sie nicht über die notwendigen Informationen

zum Studien- und Wissenschaftsbetrieb verfügten. Im Angesicht derartiger Schwierigkeiten fühlen sie sich verloren, zur gleichen Zeit aber fühlen sich chinesische Studierende auch „falsch verstanden“, wenn sie bemerken, dass ihre Lehrenden wenig Verständnis für ihre Identität als internationale Studierende zeigen. Darüber hinaus sind chinesische Studierende als Neulinge nicht mit dem akademischen Beratungs- und Unterstützungssystem an der Universität vertraut, sie können sich nur auf sich selbst oder auf chinesische Freunde gleicher Nationalität verlassen, um mit den Problemen umzugehen.

Bezüglich der Entwicklungsphase berichten chinesische Studierende von Fortschritten im Erwerb der deutschen Sprachkompetenz und im Wissen um hochschulische Gegebenheiten (Lehrangebote, Erwartungen der Lehrenden, Formen der Bewertung). Beide Prozesse fördern ihre weitere Entwicklung. Eine der Herausforderungen für die chinesischen Studierenden in der Entwicklungsphase stellt die individuelle „Aushandlung/Verhandlung“ der Differenz zwischen ihrer chinesischen pädagogischen Tradition und den für sie aktuellen akademischen Erwartungen/Ansprüchen an deutschen Universitäten. Es ist für chinesische Studierende frustrierend zu sehen, dass sich das, was sie einmal in der chinesischen Lernumwelt als „korrekt“ gelernt haben, in der deutschen Umgebung als falsch oder erwartungsfremd herausstellt. In dem Maße wie sie mit dem akademischen Unterstützungssystem an deutschen Hochschulen vertraut werden, wenden sie sich an Lehrende, Tutoren und Kommilitonen, um die Probleme zu lösen.

In der Abschlussphase zeigen chinesische Studierende Verständnis und Anerkennung für die an deutschen Hochschulen vorherrschende Erwartungshaltung. Beispielhaft gilt für die Initialphase, dass chinesische Studierende sich häufig darüber beklagen, dass sie niemand beachten würde, gleichzeitig berichten sie von großen Schwierigkeiten, sich aktiv im Seminar zu beteiligen (entweder bei Diskussionen oder Präsentationen). In der Abschlussphase jedoch interpretieren sie die Wahrnehmung „niemand kümmert sich um mich“ als Ausdruck „akademischer Freiheit“ war, wissen das Seminar (als Form der Lehre) zu schätzen und betrachten es als eine besonders interaktive Form der Lehre an deutschen Hochschulen. Der gesamte Prozess der akademischen Anpassung erwartet von den Studierenden, die Differenzen zu erkennen, zu verstehen und später wertschätzend wahrzunehmen.

Diese Untersuchung hat ferner ergeben, dass über den gesamten Prozess des Lernens an deutschen Hochschuleinrichtungen (1) der Hintergrund (deutschsprachige Kompetenz im Wissenschaftsbereich), (2) situationale Gegebenheiten (akademische Unterstützung, studentische Identität und interkulturelle Kommunikation mit Kommilitonen) und (3) personale Gegebenheiten (Persönlichkeit, persönlicher Aufwand und Teilzeit-Beschäftigung) in ihrer Kombination auf die akademische Anpassung der chinesischen Studierenden an deutschen Hochschuleinrichtungen Einfluss ausüben. Die Studie bietet Empfehlungen für künftige chinesische Studierende und deutsche Hochschuleinrichtungen, um die akademische Anpassung in Deutschland zu erleichtern.

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1. INTRODUCTION

“Internationalization in higher education is an inevitable result of the globalized and knowledge-based economy of the 21st century”.

(Altbach & Teichler, 2001, p.5).

1.1 Background of internationalization of Higher Education

Student mobility is not a novelty. A large number of medieval universities in Europe were basically international in nature (Altbach, Kelly, & Lulat, 1985): “[...] The original universities that were founded at Paris and Bologna in the 13th century [...] used a common language, Latin, and provided training to students from many countries. Professors were internationally recruited” (Altbach & Teichler, 2001, p.6). Against this background, “[...] foreign students were the norm, not the exception” (Altbach, Kelly, & Lulat, 1985). It was not until the influence of the Protestant Reformation became stronger that universities started to teach in their own national language that internationalism appeared to be less central; in spite of that, universities still kept international contact (Altbach & Teichler, 2001). Later in the 18th century, in addition to a small group of excellent students and scholars that move to prestigious academic centers, internationalization was demonstrated through the export of systems of higher education from European colonial powers (particularly the UK and France) to their colonies, and cooperation and exchange in academic research and publications (Knight & de Wit, 1995). After World War II, a new era of international educational exchange began. Aiming at achieving “a better understanding of the rest of the world and to maintain and even expand their sphere of influence” (Knight & de Wit, 1995, p.8), the U.S and the Soviet Union, which were the two superpowers that emerged from the War, began promoting international exchange for political reasons. Although countries did initiate some agreements for student exchange or research cooperation, the scale was relatively small and the main objective was more diplomacy-oriented (Knight & de Wit, 1995). In the last decades, universities have initiated various activities (participating in traditional study-abroad programs, upgrading students’ international perspectives and skills, etc.) aiming at achieving an international profile in volume, scope, and complexity (Altbach & Knight, 2007).

It is worth noting that the new trend of internationalization of Higher Education has not been limited to people, but substantial numbers of programs and institutions are operating internationally (e.g. establishment of “sister” institutions of existing universities, branch campuses of parent institution¹, collaborative arrangements) as well (Altbach & Knight, 2007). In the meantime, student mobility brings not only opportunities, but presents some challenges too. Altbach, Reisberg, and Rumbley (2009) pointed out the quality, ethics, or conditions of some international programs provided

¹ For instance, Qatar, Singapore and the United Arab Emirates, recruited well-acknowledged foreign universities to establish local campuses, aiming at expanding access for the local students (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2010).

are not easy to monitor; therefore, “increase the urgency of international standards, oversight, and qualifications frameworks” is required.

1.1.1 International students: definition and discrimination

Definition

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2010a) defines *international students* as “those who travel to a country different from their own for the purpose of tertiary study” (p.52). It is worth noting that the terms *international students* vary from country to country, considering “country-specific immigration legislation and data constraints” (OECD, 2010a, p.52). Countries define international students’ identity either according to the type of visa, namely, visa for student (e.g., Australia, Japan, and the US) or focus on whether the students holding a temporary or permanent resident (e.g., Canada, France, and Germany). Appendix 2 integrates definitions of “International students” in various countries. The importance of defining the international students and separating them from home students is based primarily on financial reasons. For example, in the UK, “international” and “home” students pay different tuition fee: the former pay several times as the later (Grimshaw, 2011, p.703).

Discrimination: international student, overseas student, and foreign student

Though the term *international student* is used by most scholars, the term *overseas student* is preferred in Australia (Baas, 2006; Barker. et al, 1991; Birrell, 2006; Bochner & Wicks, 1972; Cole, Allen, & Green, 1980; Oei & Notowidjojo, 1990; Samuelowicz, 1987) and New Zealand (Tan & Simpson, 2008), and the UK (Bochner, Hutnik, & Furnham, 1985; McNamara & Harris, 1997). One possible explanation is that all these three host countries are not located in continents; thus, in their perspectives, international students come from overseas.

Furthermore, the terms international student and foreign student is used interchangeably. OECD (2010b) uses “‘international student’ when referring to student mobility and the term ‘foreign student’ for non-citizens enrolled in a country” (p.312). Another trend is that the term *foreign student* is gradually substituted by the term *international student*, as the former was frequently used in the research between 1950 and 1980s (Altbach, Kelly, & Lulat, 1985; Du Bois, 1956; Furnham & Alibhai, 1985; Higginbotham, 1979; Hull, 1978; Klein et al., 1971; Klineberg, 1980; Pedersen, 1980; Rao, 1979; Selby & Woods, 1966; Selltitz, 1963; Terhune, 1964; Wheeler, King, & Davidson, 1925). The term *foreign student* also carries the stigma of alien, so is used less and less in our globalizing world.

1.1.2 Student mobility and student exchange

The world has witnessed an enormous increase of student mobility in recent decades. International students' mobility has become an increasingly important part of the global Higher Education landscape, as over the last three decades, the number of international students has risen dramatically, from 0.8 million in 1975 to 3.7 million in 2009 (OECD, 2011): more students are pursuing Higher Education in other countries.

Feature of student mobility

First, English-speaking countries are the major destinations of foreign students. Since English is spoken as a global language and is the first foreign language taught in most countries, the five major English-speaking countries (the US, the UK, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand) host the lion's share of international students (accounting for 42.0%).² Although some of the "old" popular destinations, due to the long established excellence of their higher education system, such as the US, the UK, and Germany are gradually losing their distinct domination, while some new players, such as Australia and New Zealand are gaining more international students between 2009 and 2000 (see Figure 1-1).

Table 1-1: Top 10 host countries of international students

	Country	2000		2009		Intl. students as a percentage of tertiary enrolment (%)
		Intl. student Number	Market Share (%)	Intl. student Number	Market Share (%)	
1	US	475,169	22.9	660,581	18.0	3.5
2	UK	222,936	10.8	363,363	9.9	15.3
3	Australia	105,764	5.1	257,637	7.0	21.5
4	Germany	187,033	9.0	256,719	7.0	11.5*
5	France	137,085	6.6	249,143	6.8	N.A**
6	Canada	94,401	4.6	190,315	5.2	6.5
7	Russia	41,210	2.0	136,214	3.7	N.A**
8	Japan	66,607	3.2	131,599	3.6	3.1
9	Spain	25,502	1.2	84,990	2.3	2.7
10	New Zealand	8,210	0.4	69,763	1.9	14.6

Source: Education at a glance 2011 (OECD, 2011a)³

* Note: The source of the statistic of Germany is "Wissenschaft Weltoffen (2009/10)"^{4,5}, as the original data of Germany in the Education at a glance 2011 is missing.

** N.A = not available

Second, the relation between sending and receiving of international students. Concerning the balance of the sending and receiving of international students,

² According to the OECD (2011), the US shared 18%, the UK 9.9%, Australia 7%, Canada 5.2%, and New Zealand 1.9% of foreign students in tertiary education in 2009 respectively.

³ Retrieved July 9, 2012, from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932464562>

⁴ 2009= 2009/10. Retrieved July 18, 2012, from <http://www.wissenschaftweltoffen.de/daten/1/1/1>

⁵ Wissenschaft Weltoffen provides facts and figures of international students in Germany and German students abroad respectively. Such data are available both online and in the form of publication, and the use of each resource will be specified in the dissertation.

Danckwortt (1984) categorized the balance of exchange-balance into two groups: balanced (equal number of student exchange between two countries) and unbalanced exchange (one-sided relationship). (1) Within the balanced exchange relation, one can further separate the balanced relation into two sub-groups: strong and weak relations. In terms of the strong sub-group, the number of students that a country sends to a specific country equals to that it receives from that country (e.g. Germany and France)⁶. Concerning weak relationship, there is little student exchange between two countries (e.g. Austria and Chile)⁷. (2) One-sided relation: one country sends a large number of students to the other, yet receives few students from that country (e.g. Germany and Poland)⁸. The historical, political, and economical situations together play an important role in the relation of student mobility/exchange between two countries.

Third, absolute number of incoming students VS proportion of international students in tertiary education varies. Although the US ranks first in terms of the absolute number of international students, it ranks quite low in terms of its actual ratio of international students to native students (3.5%); while Australia (21.5%), the UK (15.3%), and New Zealand (14.6%) have a relative high ratio of international students (OECD, 2011).

Benefit of student mobility

A university with a large percentage of foreign students is already the epitome of the world, where students with different cultural and language backgrounds meet and interact with each other and make progress together. Student mobility brings benefit to the international students, students and faculty in the host university, and international students' home country.

Benefit to individual international students. Teichler (1984) held that “a study [...] at universities in other countries [...] is generally acknowledged as a desirable way of broadening horizons and to the international exchange of scientific ideas and knowledge” (p.7). Coelho (1962) concluded that international students achieved “international understanding, technical and specialty training, personal growth and general educational development” (p.66) from the overseas study. Furthermore, against the background of globalization, both international companies and governments need internationally-competent graduates to help them successfully interact with international partners or build cross-country relationships (OECD, 2011). Moreover, through an overseas residence, international students change their attitudes towards the

⁶ For instance, Germany and France: in 2009, there were 6,774 German students studying in France, and 6,406 French students in Germany. Retrieved July 9, 2012, from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932464562>

⁷ For instance, Austria and Chile: in 2009, there were only 3 Austrian students studying in Chile; while there were 36 Chilean students studying in Austria. Retrieved July 9, 2012, from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932464562>

⁸ Take Germany and Poland for instance, in 2009, there were 13,214 Polish students studying in Germany, while there were merely 521 German students studying in Poland. Retrieved July 9, 2012, from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932464562>

host country, instead of holding stereotypes and prejudices; compared with others, they have a better understanding of the local people (Danckwortt, 1984).

Benefit to the faculty of the host university. Faculty members agree that international students bring an international perspective to the university. One study at an American university indicated that faculty members agreed their international students provided an international perspective and enriched the cultural diversity, stimulating local students, and helping them in establishing international ties (Trice, 2003); another survey conducted with faculty at British universities indicated 96% of teachers valued intercultural experience and the opportunity to learn about other cultures (Fallon & Brown, 1999). Although international students often bring challenges to the “first” culture of the host countries, lecturers agree that the experience of teaching and working with international students provides them with “new professional insights” (Zhou, Topping, & Jindal-Snape, 2011, p.246) or a more multi-faceted perspective (Ehlers & Hemmingsen, 2011). In addition, since intercultural adaptation is often regarded as a “two-way process” (Zhao & Bourne, 2011) or a “reciprocal adaptation process” (Zhou, Topping, & Jindal-Snape, 2011, p.246), both international students and the teachers/students in the host country adapt to the new learning environment.

Benefit to the domestic students of the host university. International students come to the host country with “a set of more or less well-established skills, characteristics, expectations, aspirations, habits, norms, and values” (Sewell & Davidsen, 1961, p.5) and “inject an international dimension into the home campus experience” (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2010, p.24), which actually provides domestic students with an opportunity to promote their intercultural skills without leaving home (de Wit, 1995). Empirical research also indicates that those domestic students frequently communicating with international students got knowledge of the “mentality, culture, and life in other countries” (Heublein, Özkilic, & Sommer, 2007, p.108). Another survey indicates that the more intensive and frequent one has communication with foreign students, the more information and knowledge, as well as the ability of understanding and communication that students of the host country will obtain (Heublein, Özkilic, & Sommer, 2007). In addition, contacting international students not only increases home students’ cross-cultural competence, but also helps them to establish international links (Westwood, Lawrance, & McBlane, 1986) or facilitates future employment opportunities around the world (Brown, 2009; Sovic, 2009).

Benefit to the home country: brain drain or brain gain. The returning students bring their knowledge and academic networking home, which often creates opportunities for academic and economic cooperation between the home and host country. It is indicated that 93% of scholarship-students are willing to go back to their home country (Breitenbach & Danckwortt, 1961). Take Chinese students as an example: the latest

statistics indicated that up to 2008, more than 632,200 Chinese students have returned.⁹ The statistics further reported that the return rate of students on a government sponsorship reached 98% (Wang, 2011). The Vice Minister of the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China (MOE) indicated that "China is now entering the new era of sending students abroad, in the meantime, gaining the returned students" (Zhou, 2008).

1.2 Background of internationalization of Higher Education in Germany

As shown in Table 1-1, according to the OECD (2011a), Germany is the fourth most popular destination for international students, preceded by the US, the UK, and Australia. Germany, together with France, is regarded among "the middle powers" (Verbik & Lasanowski, 2007, p.2) in the global higher education market.¹⁰

1.2.1 Context: internationalization of Higher Education in Germany

The term: distinguishment between "Bildungsausländer" and "Bildungsinländer"

Before reviewing the research on international students in Germany, it is paramount to first clarify the definition of "international students" in Germany. In the German language, international students are called "*Ausländische Studierende*". According to the criteria of whether students received their higher education entrance qualification in Germany or in another country, official government statistics have differentiated between *Bildungsausländer* (mobile international students) and *Bildungsinländer* (non-mobile international students): the former received their qualification in other countries, while the latter did so in Germany (Isserstedt & Link, 2008; Richters & Teichler, 2006). The differentiation between these two groups of international students is important: the criterion for applying to the university and applying for the financial support according to *BAföG*¹¹ between *Bildungsausländer* and *Bildungsinländer* is different: the latter can apply for it; while the former can't. In addition, although *Bildungsinländer* have a lower university participation rate than German students, the learning and living situation of *Bildungsinländer* is more similar to the German students than to *Bildungsausländer* (Krüger, 2001): since *Bildungsinländer* received their higher education entrance qualification in Germany¹², they are supposed to be more familiar

⁹ According to the Xinhua News Agency (August 22, 2012), from 1978 to 2010, over 632,200 Chinese overseas students returned to China. Retrieved May 5, 2012, from http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2011-08/22/c_131066709.htm (in Chinese)

¹⁰ Verbik and Lasanowski (2007) further pointed out, considering their conservative recruitment efforts, Germany and France were "unlikely to radically impact new markets" (p.10).

¹¹ BAföG is the abbreviation of "Bundesausbildungsförderungsgesetz": Federal Education and Trainings Assistance Act for supporting university students in Germany.

¹² Students receiving education at a German school abroad are also regarded as *Bildungsinländer*.

with the learning environment in Germany and speak better German language than *Bildungsausländer*.¹³

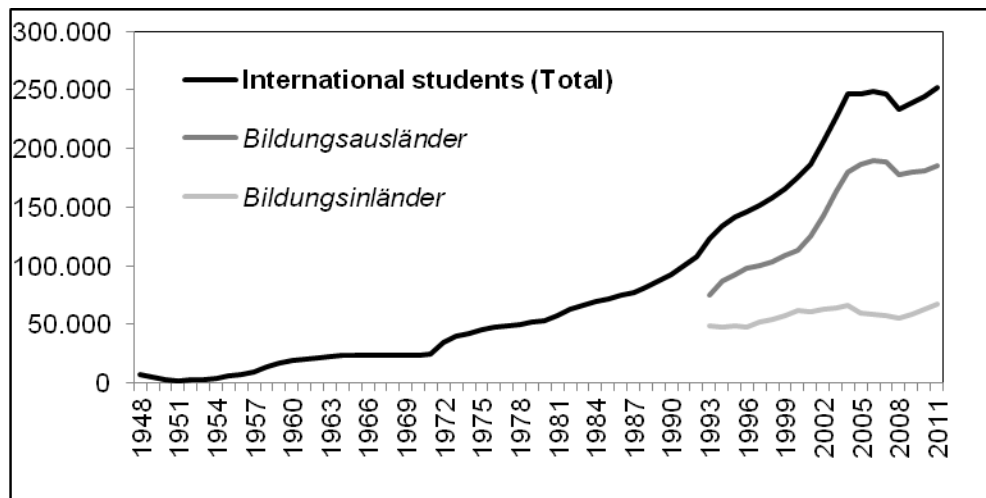


Figure 1-1: Number of international students (*Bildungsausländer* and *Bildungsinländer*) in Germany (1948-2011)

Source: *Wissenschaft weltoffen* 2012¹⁴

Germany has witnessed a great increase of international students in the last two decades; latest statistics indicate there were 252,032 foreign students (*Bildungsausländer* and *Bildungsausländer*) studying in Germany in 2011.¹⁵ Figure 1-1 indicates the increase of international students from 1948 to 2011. The majority of international students in Germany are *Bildungsausländer* and the growth of *Bildungsausländer* substantially contributes to the increase of the number of international students in Germany, while the growth of *Bildungsinländer* is stable. In 2011, there were 184,960 *Bildungsausländer* (accounting for 73.4 %) and 67,072 *Bildungsinländer* (accounting for 26.6 %) studying in Germany.

Countries of origin of international students in Germany

Among 184,960 *Bildungsausländer* in Germany, about half of the international students studying in Germany come from European countries (47.6%)¹⁶, and one-third (33.7%)¹⁷ come from Asia (*Wissenschaft Weltoffen*, 2012). Figure 1-2 indicates countries of origin of international students¹⁸ in Germany. Since 2001, Chinese students and young academics have been the largest foreign nationals in Germany (accounting for 12.3% of international students in Germany), which plays an important role in the

¹³ One recent study *Bildungsinländer 2011: Daten und Fakten zur Situation von ausländischen Studierenden mit deutscher Hochschulzugangsberechtigung* (DAAD, 2011) introduces the data of *Bildungsinländer* in details.

¹⁴ The number of *Bildungsausländer* and *Bildungsinländer* has been available since 1993.

¹⁵ 2011 = Winter semester 2010/2011

¹⁶ Retrieved July 26, 2012 from <http://www.wissenschaftweltoffen.de/daten/1/2/1>

¹⁷ Retrieved July 26, 2012 from <http://www.wissenschaftweltoffen.de/daten/1/2/1>

¹⁸ In this thesis, until it is specified, the term *international student(s)* in Germany indicates the *Bildungsausländer* only.

internationalization of German higher education institutions. Following Chinese students are other European countries such as Russia (8 %) and Poland (7 %), Bulgaria (6 %), Ukraine (5 %), and France (3%).

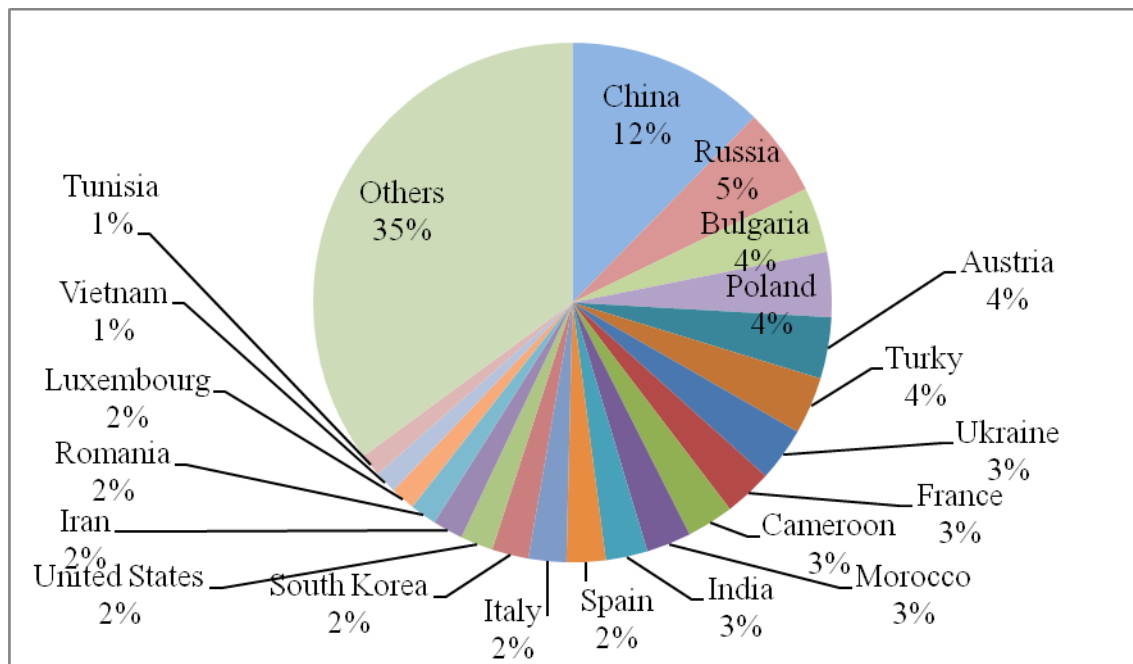


Figure 1-2: Composition of international students (Bildungsausländer) in Germany

Source: *Wissenschaft weltoffen* 2012¹⁹

Policy of internationalization of Higher Education in Germany

Background of the global education market: fierce competition for international students. Grimshaw (2011) holds that “in an increasingly marketised environment, universities understand better than ever that their economic survival is strongly linked to the competition for student clients from overseas” (p.704), as international students bring about financial benefit. For example, the US, the UK, and Australia charge international students differentiated tuition fees, which is often more expensive than that of the domestic students. In the US, it is estimated that foreign students contributed approximately \$18.78 billion (about €13.2 billion) to the US economy during the 2009-2010 academic year (NAFSA, 2009)²⁰. In the UK, the total value of international students contributed to the UK economy was about £8.5 billion (about €9.6 billion) (Lenton, 2007). In the UK, publicly funded educational institutions charge two levels of fee: the lower ‘home’ fee and the higher ‘overseas’ fee. According to UKCISA, UK (and EU) students pay over £3,000 annually for an undergraduate course (with institutions receiving the balance from funding agencies), while non-EU students have

¹⁹ Source: *Wissenschaft weltoffen* 2012, retrieved July 18, 2012, from <http://www.wissenschaftweltoffen.de/daten/1/2/1>

²⁰ NAFSA (2010). The Economic Benefits of International Education to the United States for the 2009-2010 Academic Year: A Statistical Analysis. Retrieved April 29, 2011, from <http://www.nafsa.org/File/eis2010/usa.pdf>

to pay between £8,000 and £15,000 (UKCISA, 2010)²¹. It is estimated that the total value of international students to the UK economy was about £8.5 billion (Lenton, 2007).²² In Australia, education service is a major source of export²³ and “International education activity contributed \$18.3 billion in export income to the Australian economy in 2010”.²⁴ International students also pay higher tuitions²⁵. In addition, the economic impact which is brought by foreign fee-paying students can be categorized into three main components: expenditure on tuition fees, on living costs, and the flow-on effects of both areas of expenditure on the wider economy.

Unlike the US, the UK, or Australia, Germany charges no tuition/relative little fee²⁶ from international students. If Germany does not compete for the financial benefits in the global education market, why is it motivated to receive international students, as the number of international students in Germany has been increasing?

Motivation of recruiting international students for Germany. One important motivation for Germany to receive international students is to gain the brains to deal with the problem of shortage of highly skilled worker and demographic challenge. First, international talents/graduates contribute to the economy of the host country in the long run. *According to the OECD (2010), “the rise in the knowledge economy and the global competition for skills and competencies have provided a new driver for the internationalisation of education systems in many OECD countries”* (p.310). Since many countries increasingly depend on international scientists and technologists to fuel their knowledge-based economy, those international students who currently fill the spots in many natural science or engineering graduate programs might in the future contribute to the advancement of an economic boom or the technological innovation of the host country. For instance, international postgraduate students are a significant proportion of all students in engineering, sciences and mathematics in the UK²⁷; while

²¹ UK Council for International Students Affairs (UKCISA) (2010). *Tuition fees for study in England, Wales or Northern Ireland*. Retrieved April 29, 2011, from http://www.ukcisa.org.uk/files/pdf/info_sheets/tuition_fees_ewni_print.pdf

²² For the 2010/11 academic year, average tuition and fees range from \$2,713 per year at public two year colleges and \$6,224 at public bachelor’s colleges to \$33,679 at private doctoral universities” (The College Board, 2010, p.10).

²³ According to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australian Government, coal, iron ore, education services, personal travel, gold, etc., are major merchandise and service exports. Retrieved September 30, 2011, from http://www.dfat.gov.au/facts/trade_fast_facts.html

²⁴ Research Snapshot: Export Income to Australia from Education Services in 2010 (May, 2011). Retrieved September 30, 2011, from http://221.121.69.112/AEI/PublicationsAndResearch/Snapshots/2011061803_pdf.pdf

²⁵ According to the International Student Tuition Fees 2011²⁵, international undergraduate students pay \$22,592 (€16,721) (Art) - \$61,056 (€45,186) (Medical Science), while home students (to be more specific, Commonwealth supported students) pay \$4,249- \$8,859 in 2010, as the tuition costs of Commonwealth supported students are subsidized by the Australian Government. Source: The University of Melbourne. 2010 student contribution amounts for Commonwealth supported students (subject to confirmation). Retrieved November 9, 2010 from <http://futurestudents.unimelb.edu.au/fees/aust/csp>

²⁶ Since 2005, some federal states in Germany began to charge tuition (about 500 Euro per semester). International students pay the same amount of money as their German counterparts.

²⁷ UK Council for International Students Affairs (UKCISA). *International students in the UK: facts, figures – and fiction*. Retrieved November 9, 2010, from http://www.ukcisa.org.uk/files/pdf/about/international_education_facts_figures.pdf

in the US, the small number of local students registering in those programs is relative small (Liu, 2001). Second, facing the challenge of an unprecedented demographic change²⁸, many countries, especially European countries, regard the enrolment of foreign students as part of a broader strategy to recruit highly skilled immigrants. Since the low birth rates and a declining population size becomes a concerning topic to Germany²⁹, it is crucial for Germany to attract foreign skilled labor to supplement the rapidly decreasing and ageing populations³⁰.

1.2.2 Initiatives: “Qualified in Germany”

Against the context of competition for international students, the leading host countries have established various initiatives to hold their advantages in the international markets, aiming at maintaining or establishing their credential as a world-class provider of education and training: The UK developed *Education UK brand* in 1999, in order to “create a powerful and coherent way of encouraging students who are considering overseas study to choose the UK”³¹. In addition, the former Prime Minister Tony Blair proposed a program in 1999 to increase its market share from 16% to 25% by 2005.^{32,33} Later in 2006, the second phase of the Prime Minister’s Initiative for International Education (PMI2) aimed at strengthening the UK’s position in international education³⁴. France set up *EduFrance* in 1998 to increase its competitiveness in the international educational market, aims at promoting French higher education abroad (Huber, 1999). Later in 2010, *Campus France Agency* became the new French national agency for the promotion of higher education, international student services, and international mobility.³⁵

Against the background that countries have developed various initiatives in attracting international students, Germany realized that it was not as competitive as other countries in attracting the promising international students; in order to change the situation, it exerts itself to improve and increase its international appeal (Hosseinizadeh, 2005). Huber (1999) warned that it would be a great threat and challenge to Germany

²⁸ Demographic change involves problems such as an ageing population, low birth rates, changing family structures and migration. One of the key policy responses receiving and integrating migrants into Europe. Retrieved November 7, 2011, from <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=502&langId=en>

²⁹ The Federal Ministry of the Interior: Demography Report: Federal Government Report on the Demographic Situation and Future Development of Germany. Retrieved January 5, 2012, from http://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/Themen/Politik_Gesellschaft/DemographEntwicklung/demografiebericht_kurz_en.pdf?__blob=publicationFile

³⁰ Education at a Glance 2011: OECD Indicators. Country Note – Germany. Retrieved October, 2011, from <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/44/17/48657384.pdf>

³¹ British Council. Retrieved September 30, 2011 from <http://www.britishcouncil.org/eumd-educationuk-brand-what-is.htm>

³² Prime Minister Launches Strategy to Make UK Leader in International Education. Retrieved March 6, 2011 from http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/pns/DisplayPN.cgi?pn_id=2006_0058

³³ “Cool Britannia” has been the brand name promoted in the debate of the re-branding of Britain set in motion by the 1997 report Britain TM Reviewing our Identity.

³⁴ Retrieved February 12, 2011, from <http://www.britishcouncil.org/eumd-pmi2-about.htm>

³⁵ Retrieved February 12, 2011, from <http://www.campusfrance.org/en/page/agence-campus-france>

if the overseas-trained leaders from most developing and emerging economies trained in Anglo-Saxon countries; if so, Germany would gradually miss important foreign political, cultural and political and economic influence, as well as the universities and research institutions. Regarding this, it is crucial for Germany to strengthen its position in the global education market in order to maintain its competitiveness in scientific, economic and political area (Huber, 1999), in order not to lag behind in the international market. Under such background, Germany raised the initiative *Qualified in Germany* in 1999.

Qualified in Germany

Huber (1999) analyzed the strength and weakness of the German university system (see table 1-2). At first sight, it seems that there are more weaknesses than strength of the German university system; however, if one takes the non/low tuition into consideration, which is actually the biggest attraction to many international students, he will find that German universities have their advantages in attracting international students.

Table 1-2: Strength and weakness of German university system³⁶

Strength	Weakness
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A diversified research and training system³⁷ ▪ A unique opportunities of global networks (e.g. DAAD³⁸ and AvH³⁹) ▪ Well-organized network of universities and research institutions, ▪ Tuition free⁴⁰ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The German language ▪ The chronic underfunding ▪ The free tuition⁴¹ ▪ None globally recognized top universities ▪ The lack of “alumni” culture ▪ Legal aliens and labor laws ▪ The representation of German language is not as influential as the contribution of English in terms of media (both printed and electronic) outside of Germany.

Source: Huber, 1999, p. 21-25

Qualified in Germany defined the present and future role of Germany in the international education market, and put forward an initiative to strengthen the position of the Federal Republic of Germany in this growing market (Huber, 1999). The goal of *Qualified in Germany* is divided into three dimensions. (1) Dimension A: to provide more courses in order to expand student numbers from a quantitative perspective; (2) Dimension B: to take measures to strengthen the reputation of German higher education and reinforce the demands; (3) Dimension C: to reduce obstacles in terms of immigration law, organization/ employment law (Huber, 1999).

³⁶ The table was translated from German to English by the author.

³⁷ In Germany, universities (Universität) focus more on research, and universities of applied science (Fachhochschule) place great emphasis on practical experience in training and applied research.

³⁸ DAAD is the abbreviation of Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (German Academic Exchange Service). Its budget of scholarships for foreigners is 83 million Euros. Retrieved June 8, 2012, from <http://www.daad.de/portrait/wer-wir-sind/kurzportrait/08940.en.html>

³⁹ AvH is the abbreviation of Alexander von Humboldt-Foundation

⁴⁰ Only few federal states in Germany charge tuition fee.

⁴¹ On the one hand, “tuition free” is regarded as an attraction of German universities. On the other hand, tuition free has its shortcomings as well: (1) people might hold a sceptical attitude to the quality of Higher Education in Germany, as “What doesn't cost anything isn't worth anything”; (2) universities cannot recruit and provide supervision for international students for lack of extra funding (Huber, 1999).

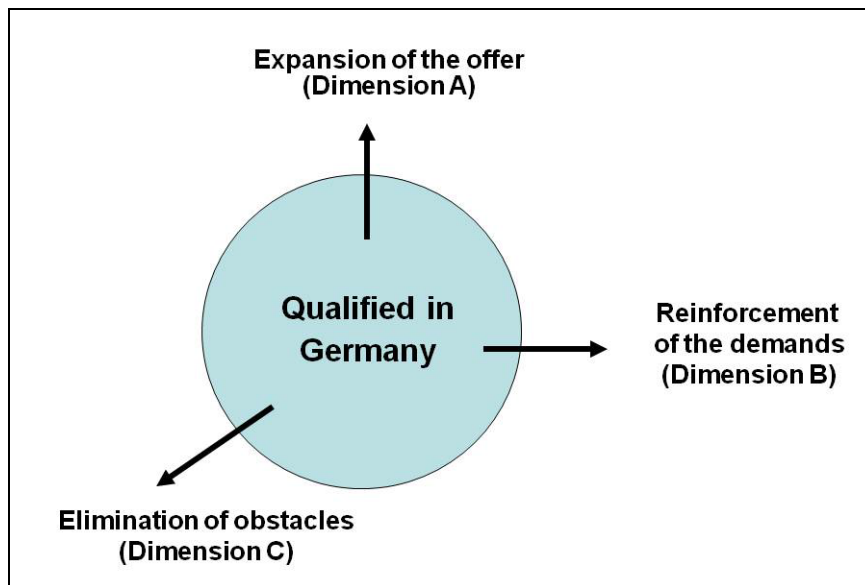


Figure 1-3: Schematic representation of the recommendations of the “Qualified in Germany”⁴²
Source: Huber, 1999, p.44

Quality, instead of quantity, matters

In the last decade, after the announcement of *Qualified in Germany*, Germany has reached the quantitative goal of Dimension A, as it sees continued rise in the number of international students at German universities. However, the quality of internationalization of German universities equally counts.

One big challenge that German universities face is the poor academic performance of international students. One recent report conducted by *Hochschul-Informationen-System* (HIS) astonishingly revealed that about one third of international students at these universities pass the exam and complete the study; while the remaining two-thirds of them left the above universities and seem to “disappeared” (they either transfer to another university or simply drop out). The dropout rate is higher than that of German student (50%) (Heublein, Sommer, & Weitz, 2004). The high dropout rate among international students, to some extent, damages the reputation of German universities.

The substantial expansion of international students in Germany raises one question: whether German universities are ready for recruiting such a large number of international students? Whether they are well equipped with both hard skill (a large number of courses are available) and soft skill (new concepts for facilitating international students’ learning experience on campus, e.g. German language courses, mentor or buddy-programs, intercultural training courses, etc.) for the change of the students’ composition?

The general secretary of DAAD, Christian Bode, has clearly interpreted the internationalization of German universities as:

⁴² The text in the graph was translated from German to English by the author.

*“Internationalization of German universities does not only limit to the fact that German students or lecturers stay overseas or vice versa. Internationalization is a process, which takes place at local universities, through the engagement of lecturers and students. An important element of such development is the integration of foreign students at university, as well as the increase of the international-oriented courses. Graduates should have intercultural communication skills and linguistic skills, so as to master the ability to work in international teams and be able to deal with the new and unfamiliar situation”*⁴³

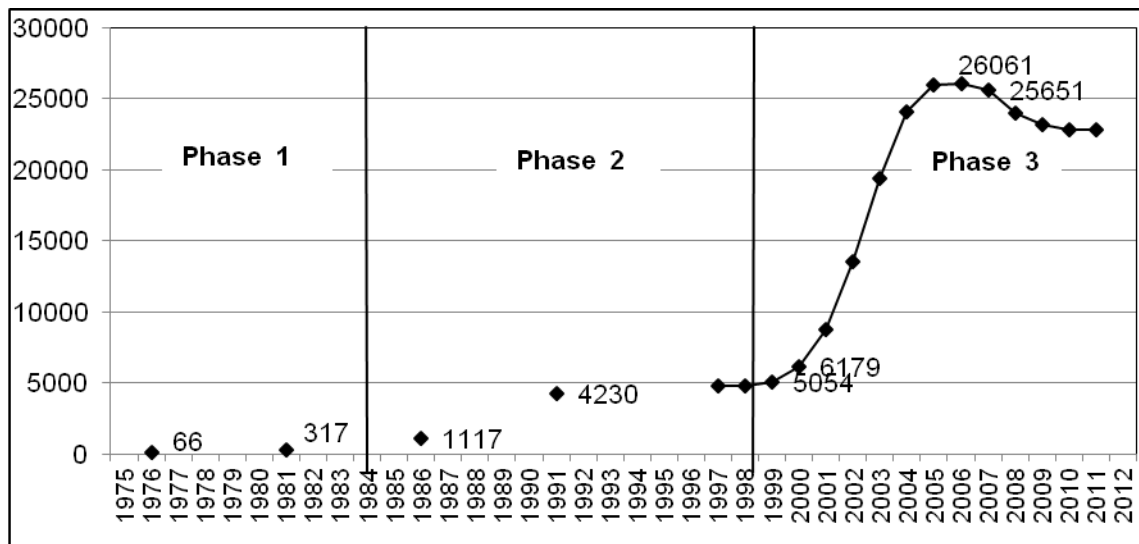
(cited in Heublein, Özkilic, & Sommer, 2007. p.5).

A large number of German universities exert themselves to become international, by attracting excellent international students and researchers to Germany and increasing student exchange. Nevertheless, one recent survey indicates that, among those students who have been informed that the universities are international-oriented, only 17% German students agreed that German universities are international, while 56% German find that their programs are not international at all (Heublein, Özkilic, & Sommer, 2007, p.70). Furthermore, in recruiting international students, it is crucial to ask one question: whether German universities are well-prepared for the increase of international students? In addition, Heublein and his associates (2004) advocate enhancing the effectiveness of international students should be given priority. They believe that only under the precondition that international students finish their study successfully, can German universities achieve the goal of being international.

1.3 Profiles of Chinese students studying in Germany

Germany has witnessed sharp rises in the number of Chinese students in the last decade. The latest statistics indicates there are 22,828 Chinese students studying in Germany (*Wissenschaft weltoffen* 2012). Figure 1-4 shows, in 1976, there were only 66 Chinese students studying in Germany, while the growth of Chinese students reached its peak in 2006 (26,061 Chinese students). Based on the political and historical issue, the development of Chinese students can be divided into three phases.

⁴³ The text was translated from German to English by the author.



Note: Statistics of Chinese students before 1997 (except 1976, 1981, 1986, and 1991) are not available.

Figure 1-4: Number of Chinese students⁴⁴ in Germany (1975-2010)

Source: *Wissenschaft weltoffen* 2011

First phase (1949-1984): China established diplomatic relations with Germany in 1972. One year later, after almost three decades break of the academic link between two countries (Meng, 2000), ten German students and ten Chinese students were sent to the other country for exchange. After the Cultural Revolution, the central government issued “Report of raising the number of Chinese students studying abroad”⁴⁵ in 1978, which was strongly supported by the late leader Deng Xiaoping. Since then, there has been a rapid increase in the numbers of Chinese students studying abroad.⁴⁶

Second phase (1985-1998): The statistics of overseas students abroad clearly indicated the policy of overseas study in China. In 2010, there were over 284,700 students and scholars studying abroad⁴⁷. The characteristic of this phase is: more self-funded students had the opportunity of studying abroad. In 1985, China abolished the practice of “Verification of pursuing self-funded overseas studies” (in Chinese 自费出国留学资格审核) and the number of self-funded students gradually increased. The number of Chinese students in Germany reached 1,117 in 1985, which is 16.92 times as many as that in 1976.

⁴⁴ In the following text, the term “Chinese students”, unless specified, are referred to the Bildungsausländer (mobile foreign students), while the number of Bildungsinländer (non-mobile foreign students) students are not included.

⁴⁵ In Chinese: 《关于加大选派留学生的数量的报告》

⁴⁶ A book called *Chinese Students Encounter America* (Qian, 2002) vividly depicts the passion of going abroad (in Chinese 出国热 or *chuguore*) among Chinese students at that period of time.

⁴⁷ Retrieved October 19, 2011, from MoE

http://www.moe.gov.cn/publicfiles/business/htmlfiles/moe/moe_1485/201103/115528.html

Third phase (1999- now)⁴⁸: China began to expand the scale of its higher education enrollment in 1999. Nevertheless, the demand of receiving higher education expands dramatically in China in the last 10 years and currently the Chinese universities cannot meet applicants' needs. Against this background, the number of Chinese students rises by 37.2% averagely. The inflection point appeared in 2001, as the number of Chinese students in Germany increased by 54.6%⁴⁹. Later in 2002, the number of Chinese students increased to over 10,000. As the number of graduating Chinese students increases faster than that of the new coming Chinese students, the total number of Chinese students in Germany decreased between 2007 and 2010.

The Figure 1-4 shows that it is in the recent decade that the number of Chinese students in Germany increases quickly; therefore, the presence of Chinese students brings challenges to German universities. To lecturers at German universities, they still need time to get familiar with Chinese students' learning styles and expectation, which might become new challenges to German lecturers in teaching in an intercultural educational setting. To Chinese students who come from a learning setting that does not share the same learning culture or tradition as in Germany, they encounter challenges in the German academic milieu. For example, Chinese students, as well as students from other Eastern Asian countries encounter substantial challenges in determining or organizing study by themselves, as the university system at home often arrange it for them (Zeilinger, 2006).

According to the latest statistics (*Wissenschaft Weltoffen 2012*), the number of international students pursuing a postgraduate study in Germany continued to increase.

With the introduction of Bachelor and Master-system in Germany, the number of *Bildungsausländer* and German students attending Bachelor or Master's courses has been gradually increasing.⁵⁰ There were 28% of all *Bildungsausländer* enrolled in a postgraduate course, while the number of international students pursuing the traditional *Magister* and *Diplom* decreased.⁵¹ The overwhelming majority of *Bildungsausländer* registering at universities of applied sciences (in German: *Fachhochschule*, FH) were

⁴⁸ The number of Chinese graduates is bigger than that of the first-year: the number of first year students is 2,645 (in 2006), 2,738 (in 2007), 3,087 (in 2008), and 3,386 (in 2009) respectively, while the number of graduates is 3,030 (in 2006), 3,959 (in 2007), 4,553 (in 2008) and 4,703 (in 2009). Retrieved July 17, 2011, from <http://www.wissenschaft-weltoffen.de/daten/2/2/7> and <http://www.wissenschaft-weltoffen.de/daten/3/2/3>

⁴⁹ The number of Chinese students in Germany increased from 6,179 in 2000 to 8,754 in 2001.

⁵⁰ According to *Wissenschaft weltoffen 2012*, there are three types of study at higher education institutions in Germany, namely, first degree course, (post-) graduate studies, and doctoral studies. Each type of course leads to an academic degree: "First degree courses are studies that lead to a first academic degree. (Post-) graduate studies are studies taken after completing a first degree course and include studies such as a second degree course, post-graduate courses, complementary, extension or supplementary studies, refresher courses or continuing training course". Retrieved July 26, 2012 from http://www.wissenschaftweltoffen.de/glossar/a02_html?lang=en Since the data of *Bildungsausländer* are provided in the form of "first degree" and "postgraduate degree" respectively, instead of as a whole, the introduction of the target degree of *Bildungsausländer* is divided into "first degree" and "postgraduate degree" accordingly.

⁵¹ According to the Bologna-Process, since 2010, German universities did not enroll any new students in the traditional *Magister* and *Diplom* programs. Currently, about 42% *Bildungsausländer* registered in "Diplom and other degrees" at universities (*Wissenschaft weltoffen 2012*).

bachelor students. Together with the introduction of Bachelor and Masters' degree, the large number of postgraduate programs offered at German higher education institutions contributes to the increase of postgraduate students in Germany. Such distribution of academic degree of *Bildungsausländer* is similar to that of the US, where 42% international students are registered in the post-graduate programs, while 39.7% are doing an undergraduate program. In the UK, the majority international students are taught- or research- postgraduate (88%) and only 11% are first degree students.⁵²

The number of Chinese students, majoring in "Engineering" (39.5%), "Law, Economics and Social Science" (22.2%), and "Mathematics and natural science" (19.1%) accounts for 80.8% of all the Chinese students studying in Germany. Unlike German and international students, smaller percentage of Chinese students study in the field of "Linguistics and Cultural Studies". One reason is such subject requiring a good command of German language and culture, while most Chinese students, compared with their German or European counterparts, have relative little knowledge. Concerning academic disciplines, international students demonstrate similar preference as German students: "Law, Economics and Social Science", "Engineering", and "Linguistics and Cultural Studies" are most popular subjects for both German and international students.⁵³ According to the observation of *Wissenschaft weltoffen 2012*, in the last decade, Economics and Germanic Studies were two leading fields of study among *Bildungsausländer*. The distribution of academic disciplines among Chinese students is slightly different from that of German and international students, as Germany universities is strong in the subject of engineering and natural science, such subjects are well acknowledged among Chinese students. More Chinese students major in engineering than German and international students.

1.4 Research question

The research question is: how do Chinese students adjust to the German educational milieu and the intercultural learning environment?

Volet (1999a) held "Each specific learning context appears to have its own unique culture of learning, with some explicit but also many tacit rules and expectations which provide subjective criteria for evaluating what are appropriate learning behaviors in that context" (p.626). How do Chinese students adjust to the new learning environment? The process of academic adjustment and learning experience, factors influencing adjustment, and their educational development and personal growth will be analyzed.

⁵² UKCISA. Higher education statistics. Retrieved 21 June, 2011 from http://www.ukcisa.org.uk/about/statistics_he.php#table2

⁵³ In terms of the percentage, more international students major in Engineering than German domestic students.

First, what is the process of academic adjustment that Chinese students experience at German universities? In introducing the integrated cross-cultural adaptation theory, Kim (1988) hold that “everyone adapts, but at a different rate” (p.163), and suggested that “our concern, therefore, is not *whether* individuals adapt, but *how*” (p.9). Transferring from the home learning environment to the German one, what kind of experience do Chinese students have? Which learning strategy do they adopt in order to meet the academic requirement of German universities? Holmes (2004) laid great stress on understanding how Chinese students “make the transition from their first culture education to new constructs for learning, socializing, communicating, and being” (p.294).

Second, what are the crucial factors (background, situational and personal) that facilitate or impede adaptation? Why some Chinese students are well-adjusted while others are poorly-adjusted? How do the background, situational (on-campus academic support and off-campus social and emotional support, intercultural communication, etc.) and personal/internal factors (attending further German language training, intercultural competence, etc.) influence adjustment of Chinese students at German universities?

Third, what kind of educational development and personal growth do Chinese students obtain during their learning experience in Germany? Senior international students reported greater gains in the personal and social development domain (Zhao, Kuh, & Carini, 2005). What do Chinese students benefit from studying in Germany? Whether they achieve personal development and growth, in addition to academic or professional knowledge?

1.5 Structure of the thesis: an overview of chapters

The thesis consists of six chapters. Chapter 1 is a general introduction to the thesis, providing an overview of the academic background of the present research in a broader context, and putting forward the research question and the purpose of the present study. Chapter 2 reviews the literature concerning the term “adjustment”, its model, and its type. Furthermore, Chapter 3 studies the current research on international students’ adjustment in host countries, which begins with a general review on international students studying abroad, and then the focus moves to the Chinese students abroad, the state of art of research on international students in Germany and Chinese students in Germany respectively. Chapter 4 is the methodology chapter, in which the methodology, research design and procedures, and reliability and validity are described. Chapter 5 demonstrates the result of Chinese students’ academic adjustment in Germany (including the pre-departure period, initial phase, developing phase, and final phase). Chapter 6 is a discussion part. Factors influencing the academic adjustment and suggestions facilitating Chinese students’ academic adjustment at German universities are put forward.

2. THEORIES OF ADJUSTMENT

This chapter reviews the theories concerning adjustment. First, the problem of inconsistent use of the terminology is pointed out and the term *adjustment* is interpreted from an academic disciplinary (biology, psychology, sociology/ socio-psychology, anthropology) perspective. Second, models and types of adjustment will be discussed.

2.1 Background: inconsistent terminology of adjustment and sojourners

Before discussing about the theories of adjustment, it is necessary to define “what is adjustment” and “who needs to get adjusted”? This part will discuss the terminology of “adjustment” and “sojourner”.

2.1.1 Inconsistent terminology of adjustment

“The term cross-cultural adaptation can be considered a grab-bag term, camouflaging a heterogeneous and complex reality”.

(Anderson, 1994, p.307).

In the past decades, research on cross-cultural adaptation has received more attention. Such large amount of research on adjustment, on the one hand, has been generally characterized by theoretical diversity; on the other side, researchers and scholars have been using a variety of terms, such as *adaptation*, *acculturation*, *adjustment*, and *accommodation* interchangeably referring to the process that sojourners go through in a new culture (Kim, 1988; Searle & Ward, 1990). Therefore, the inconsistent use of the terminology is one of the biggest problems that challenge the research on intercultural adjustment. Readers are easily confused with the “creative” and “flexible” combination of the terms, as “the term ‘international adjustment’ or ‘sojourner adjustment’ is sometimes used interchangeably with ‘cross-cultural adjustment’ or ‘intercultural adjustment’” (Tsang, 2001, p.350). Table 2-1 demonstrates an example of the ambiguous usage of the terminologies. On the left (Term 1) are various adjectives (intercultural, cross-cultural, and sociocultural) and on the right (Term 2) is adjustment and adaptation respectively. Based on this, a large number of combinations have been created, such as “intercultural adjustment” (Gundykunst, 1998), “intercultural adaptation” (Zhao, 2007; Zhao & Bourne, 2011; Zhong, 1996), “cross-cultural adjustment” (Black & Gregersen, 1991; Wang, 2009), “cross-cultural adaptation” (Anderson, 1994; Lewthwaite, 1996; Kim, 1988; Kim, 2007), “sociocultural adjustment” (Delgado-Gaitan, 1988; Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006), “sociocultural adaptation” (Ward & Kennedy, 1999) and cultural adjustment (Kagan & Cohen, 1990).

Table 2-1: Possible combination between the terms

Term 1		Term 2
A. intercultural		a. adjustment
B. cross-cultural		b. adaptation
C. sociocultural		
D. cultural		

2.1.2 Sojourner

“Sojourner adjustment is both a task and a process”

(Ady, 1995, p. 92)

Another background that we should take a look at, before discussing adjustment further, is the subject of the adjustment: sojourner. The term “sojourner” was first put forwarded by Siu in 1952:

“the concept may be applied to a whole range of foreign residents in any country to the extent that they maintain sojourner attitudes. [...] The colonist, the foreign trader, the diplomat, the foreign student, the international journalist, the foreign missionary, the research anthropologist abroad, and all sorts of migrant group in different areas on the globe, in various degree, may be considered sojourners in the sociological sense” (Siu, 1952, p.34).

Systematic research on sojourners has been undertaken since middle 1950s (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2006), which is stimulated by Peace Corps movement and the increasing international student exchange programs, and multinational trade during the post-war period (Church, 1982; Kim, 2007; Pruitt, 1978). Sojourners met some challenges during their stay abroad (Kim, 1988) and some expatriate managers failed to fulfilled their task abroad and returned ahead of the term of service (Baker & Ivancevich, 1971).

It is worth noting that sojourners differentiate themselves from other settlers (immigrants, refugees, and tourist) in three points. First, in terms of length of being abroad (not intending for permanent settlement): for example, Ward, Bochner and Furnham (2006) mentioned that “although there are no fixed criteria for defining a sojourn in terms of its duration, 6 months to 5 years are commonly cited parameters” (p.142). Second, concerning the will and purpose of going abroad: sojourners often voluntarily leave their countries obtaining an education, fulfill employment responsibilities, or for humanitarian reasons (Church, 1982; Salkind, 2008; Ward, 2001). In some cases some sojourner may choose to work or live in that host country longer, others are expected to leave the host country upon completion of their task. Third, sojourner “clings to the culture of his own ethnic group as in contrast to the bicultural complex of the marginal man. Psychologically he is unwilling to organize himself as a

permanent resident in the country of his sojourn” (Siu, 1952, p.34). In addition, Church (1982) pointed out the character of sojourner adjustment: “the normal process of acculturation involves gradual changes in the home and host culture identifications with successive stages of the sojourn characterized by increasingly clear and differentiated images of host country reference groups” (p.554).

A big challenge to the sojourners is they are assumed “to be situated psychologically within and between two cultural systems” (Sewell & Davidsen, 1961, p.5). On the one hand, they have to adjust to the new environment and culture in the host country rapidly after arrival (Ward, Bochner & Furnham, 2006); on the other hand, when they return home, after a certain period of time, “reacclimate” to their previous home culture (Salkind, 2008). Sussman (2002) hold that sojourners are expected to encounter the daily recognition of differences with daily decisions on how to respond, which make them feel stressful and exhausted.

2.2 Multiple interpretation of “adjustment” from different academic disciplines

Researchers and scholars have already noticed the problem of the inconsistent use of the term. Church (1982) pointed “The varied and ambiguous use of the term *adjustment* has complicated the sojourner adjustment literature and made integration of findings more difficult” (p.560). Kim (1988) also pointed out that in spite of the fact that the field profit from the diversity and richness of approaches, “it suffers from the application of divergent disciplinary viewpoints by different investigators” (Kim, 1988, p.244). Thus, a further question is, whether the difference of the terms is caused by choice of words, researchers’ personal preference, or it is originated from the real difference of concepts/discipline? Because of this, it is crucial that we first clarify the concept and definition of “adjustment”, “adaptation” and “acculturation”, before deciding the terminology or further exploring the academic adjustment of Chinese students. The following text will make a distinction of the term *adjustment* among various disciplinary origins. For instance, in the academic field of biology, the term *adaptation* is often used, while in psychology, researchers and scholars often employ the term *adjustment*; while the term *acculturation* is applied in anthropology.

Biological perspective. The term *adaptation* was originally put forward by Charles Darwin as “the idea of adjustment to environment” (Ogburn & Nimkoff, 1964, p.51), as he hold that “natural selection is the primary process which is responsible for evolutionary change over times as more favourable variants are retained and less favorable ones are rejected” (Gallagher, Nelson, & Weiner, 2003, p.4). Similarly, Smelser and Baltes (2001) defined the term *adaptation* as “an extent or degree of matching or suitedness between the heritable features of organisms and the environments” (p.67). Based on the definition, it is not difficult to identify that the biological interpretation stresses the individual’s own organic characters and the

challenge created by the natural environment. In addition, the term *adaptation* is more frequently referred in the biological literature than in other disciplines (Ogburn & Nimkoff, 1964).

Psychological perspective. The term *adjustment* is often used in the field of psychology. In psychological perspective, Colleen Ward and her colleagues conducted a series of studies with sojourners in the past two decades and made the distinction between *psychological* and *sociocultural* adjustment, for sojourner to successfully get adjusted in the new environment (Ward & Rana-Deuba, 1999): the former emphasizes how individual deal with the stress and cope with the depression so as to achieve the psychological or emotional wellbeing; while the latter the ability to “fit in” or negotiate interactive aspects of the new culture, is more appropriately placed within a social learning paradigm (Ward & Chang, 1997; Ward & Rana-Deuba, 1999). Based on the above theoretical construction, Ward and Kennedy (1999) used two scales to assess the sojourner adjustment.

Ward and Rana-Deuba (1999) further suggested psychological adjustment could be best interpreted within a clinically oriented framework of a stress and coping model; while social learning and social cognition models can be understood as sociocultural adjustment, or the ability to “fit in” or negotiate interactive aspects of the new culture. Based on this, Ward and her colleagues used *Zung Self-rating Depression scale* for the psychological adjustment and developed *Sociocultural Adaptation Scale (SCAS)* for the sociocultural adjustment (Searle & Ward, 1990). Moreover, Ward and her colleagues have been making contributions to the research on exploring the interrelationship between sojourner adjustment and other theories continuously: they attempted to find out the interrelationship between psychological and sociocultural adjustment and Berry’s theory on acculturation strategies (Ward & Kennedy, 1994), specific Big Five personality dimensions (Ward, Leong, & Low, 2004), and locus of control (LOC) (Ward & Kennedy, 1992). In addition, their samples are diversified, covering New Zealand and American residents in Singapore respectively (Ward & Kennedy, 1992; Ward & Chang, 1997), international aid workers in Nepal (Ward & Rana-Deuba, 1999), and overseas students from Malaysia and Singapore in New Zealand (Searle & Ward, 1990). Furthermore, Ward and her associates have also explored and compared the results psychological and sociocultural adjustment from a longitudinal manner (Ward & Kennedy, 1999). It is worth noting that another big contribution is that psychological and sociocultural becomes a standard assessment of cross-cultural adjustment, which is later widely used by various studies on sojourner adjustment (Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006; Wang, 2009).

Nevertheless, the division of *psychological* and *sociocultural adjustment* receives some criticism. Brown and Holloway (2008) pointed out “these two aspects (*psychological* and *sociocultural*) of adjustment were found to be intertwined; the phenomenon of segregation, though driven by an *emotional* need for security and belonging” (p.245-246). Gu (2011) held that research adopting psychological methodologies “often fail to take

into account the role of human agency in the management by international students of their overseas learning experiences” (p.216).

It is a remarkable fact that the discipline of psychology has contributed tremendously to the research on immigrants and the process of immigration (Berry, 2001). In addition to the term *adjustment*, *acculturation* is often referred in the field of psychology as well, for instance, psychology promotes to the term *psychological acculturation* (Graves, 1967, p.337); in spite of the fact that the term *acculturation* is originally referred in anthropology (which is to be introduced in the anthropological perspective).

Sociological/ sociopsychological perspective. Shaffer and Shoben (1956) discriminated the term *adjustment* and *adaptation* from sociopsychological perspective: the former (adjustment) is referred as the reduction or satisfaction of (short-term) drives, while the latter (adaptation) is described “valuable for (long-term) individual or racial survival” (p.56). They held that although the objectives and time frames differed, both terms were referred to the achievement between person and the environment. Sussman (2000) shared Shaffer and Shoben’ opinion, as she held that: “Distinct from adjustment, however, adaptation is conceptualized as the successful endpoint of the accommodation process” (p.364). In summary, both Shaffer and Shoben, and Sussman’s view emphasize the different state of adjustment and adaptation. Shaffer and Shoben regard adjustment is a short-term accommodation and adaptation as long-term one; while Sussman defines adaptation is the “endpoint” of successful accommodation.

There is another interpretation, in the field of sociology, the term *adjustment* or *adaptation* is not frequently used⁵⁴, instead, some sociologist used the word “harmonious relationship” (Ogburn & Nimkoff, 1964, p.51). Moreover, unlike in biology, that death “is a simple objective test for lack of adjustment” (Ogburn & Nimkoff, 1964, p.51), it is difficult to judge whether the adjustment is good or bad in sociology.

Anthropological perspective. The acculturation phenomena were first discussed by Plato (Rudmin, 2003); while the term *acculturation* originated from anthropology. In the *Memorandum for the Study of Acculturation*, Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits (1936) defined: “Acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups” (p.149). Inspired by the distinction between collective or group-level phenomenon, and individual-level psychological acculturation originally put forward by Graves (1967), Berry et al. (1987) suggested dividing acculturation into two levels, namely, group-level and individual-level. In terms of the “group-level”, acculturation has been involved “changes in social structures and institutions and in cultural practices”; as regard to the “individual-level” focuses more on “changes in a person’s behavioural repertoire”. Kim

⁵⁴ For example, Ogburn and Nimkoff (1964) suggested that “The idea of *adjustment* is more common to biological than to sociological literature” (p.51)

(1988) viewed acculturation as re-enculturation or “second-time enculturation” (p.53). In addition, in terms of the word formation, it is not difficult to identify “acculturation” is combined with prefix “ac-”, meaning “to, toward” and the word root “cultur(e)” and “ation” turns the verb to noun. Therefore, the definition of *acculturation*, literally, refers to the process of moving towards another culture.⁵⁵

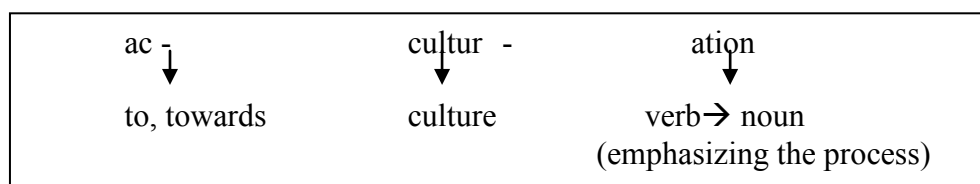


Figure 2-1: The word formation of the term acculturation

It is also worth noting the similarity and difference of the research on *acculturation* between sociology and anthropology: similar to sociology, the field of anthropology “has treated acculturation primarily as a group phenomenon” (Kim, 1988, p.12-13), instead of dwelling on the level of individuals; the difference between anthropological and sociological studies is the former focuses more on the dynamics of cultural change, while the later pays more attention to the socioeconomic and political dynamics between the sojourner/ immigrants group and host community.

Furthermore, in the field of anthropology, the term *assimilation* is sometimes used as the synonym of *acculturation*, which is defined as a phase of acculturation by Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits (1936). Berry and his associates preferred using the term *acculturation*, as they regarded *acculturation* emphasized the reciprocal influence on groups of individuals of both cultures (Berry et al., 2011). Furthermore, in addition to the term *assimilation*, some new terms such as *biculturalism*, *multiculturalism*, *integration* and *globalization* were used interchangeably with the term *acculturation* as well (Berry et al., 2011).

In addition, by evaluating responses to these two dimensions are dichotomized, Berry explored four acculturation attitudes or strategies may be distinguished: integration, separation, assimilation, and marginalization, according to the strategies of larger societies (multiculturalism, melting pot, segregation, and exclusion) (see Figure 2-2). For instance, Wang (2009) explored the strategies of international students and suggested the assimilation approach served as the best acculturation strategy for Chinese international students who study in the US” (p.155) and suggested that more contact with host nationals was probably better than staying only in one’s own cultural community. Sussman (2000) later extended the strategies of readjustment, after the repatriation, in one’s home country.

⁵⁵ According to the Merriam-Webster (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/>), the first known use of adaptation is earlier (1640), which follows by adjustment (1644) and acculturation (1880).

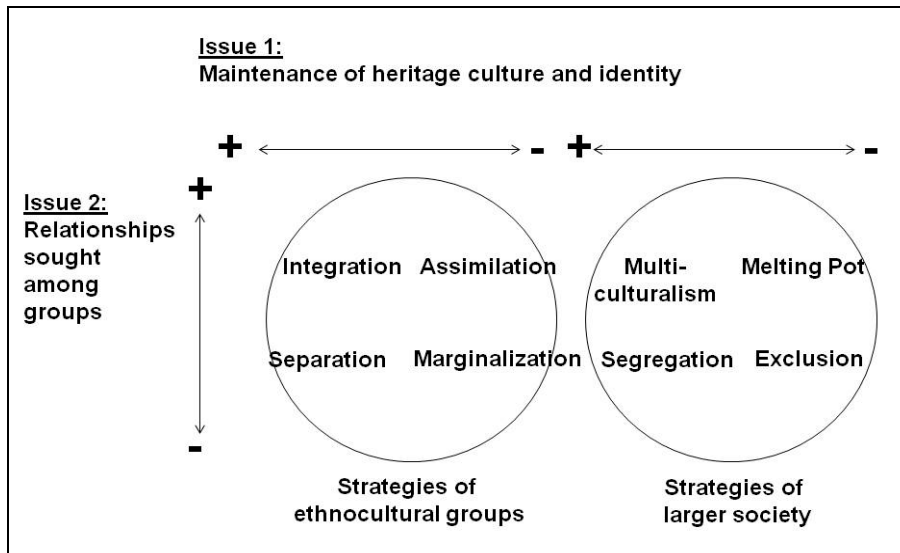


Figure 2-2: Four acculturation strategies
Source: Berry, 2005, p.705

In summary, the difference of the term *adjustment*, *adaptation*, and *acculturation* can be described from different academic disciplines (see Figure 2-3). The term *acculturation*, originated from anthropology, concerns groups of individuals contacting group of people from different culture background and making subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns. While the term *adaptation* and *adjustment* is on the individual-level (from both psychological and social integration perspective). The difference is the former often refers to the long-term residents or the endpoint of the survival status, while the latter describes the short-term sojourners. Since this research focuses on the learning experience of Chinese students on the individual-level, and most of them are sojourners, who aim at spending a short-term stay abroad, this thesis uses the term *adjustment*.

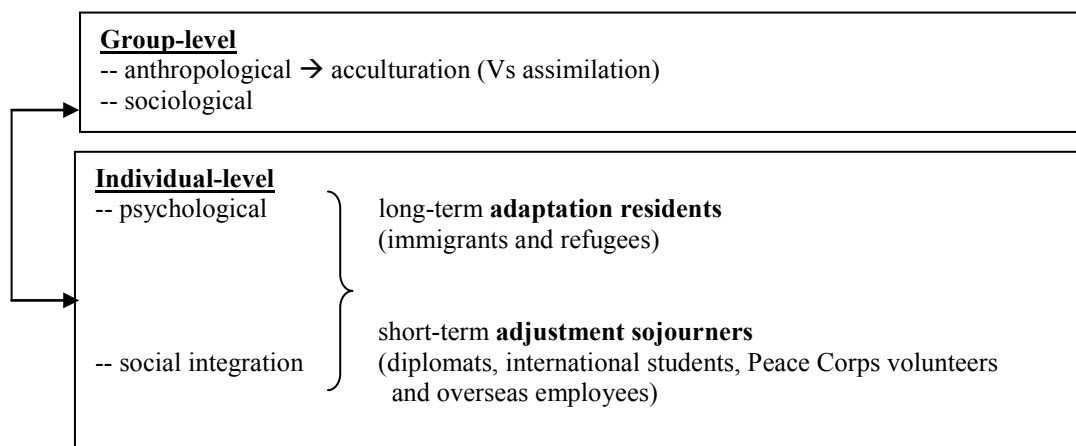


Figure 2-3: Multiple use of the term “adjustment” from different disciplines

2.3 Models of adjustment

It has been long that researchers explore and search for the structural organizations and process of adjustment. Scholars have various interpretations of such process. For example, Searle and Ward (1990) summarized the cross-cultural transitions into three models: clinical perspectives, social learning models, and social cognition approaches. Lewthwaite (1996) concluded the cross-cultural adaptation into four models: culture shock model/ a crisis of personality or identity, a learning process, a combination of a process of learning and recovery, and a dynamic and cyclical process of tension reduction until stability is achieved. Inspired by the above and six general principles applying to cross-cultural adaptation put forward by Anderson (1994)⁵⁶, the following text will mainly review five models: (1) stages/phases model, (2) curvilinear model, (3) learning theory, (4) dynamic, cyclical and recursive model, and (5) communication model of cross-cultural adaptation.

2.3.1 Stages/phases model

The stage/phase model regards adjustment as a composite of different stages or phases. So far, previous research divides the stages of adjustment ranging from four to six.

Four phases/stages. Du Bois (1956) divided the sojourners' adjustment into four phases, namely, the spectator phase, the adaptive phase, the coming-to-terms phase, and the pre-departure phase. Later, anthropologist Oberg (1960) put forward the term *cultural shock*, which was defined as "anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse. These signs or cues include the thousand and one ways in which we orient ourselves to the situations of daily life" (Oberg, 1960, p.177). Oberg further proposed four stages of the cultural shock: a honeymoon stage, a rejection stage; a regression stage; and a stage of achieving adjustment. It is important to point out, U-curve (which is to be introduced in the second model) does not equal to the *culture shock*. Although much research uses both terms/concept interchangeably, they are different.

Five phases/stages. Adler (1975) viewed the process of sojourner adjustment as a transitional experience and summarized such transitional experience into five stages: contact stage, disintegration stage, reintegration, autonomy stage, and independence stage. Adler regarded the transitional experience moving from "a state of low self- and cultural awareness to a state of high self- and cultural awareness" (p.15), which draws much attention on "the transformation of a stranger's cognitive, affective, and behavioural being in the process of becoming intercultural competent" (Taylor, 1994, p.156). In addition to Adler's point of view, Yoshikawa (1988) regarded adjustment as a process of contact, integration, reintegration, autonomy, and double swing, while

⁵⁶ Anderson (1994) suggested that the process involves adjustments, implies learning and a stranger-host relationship; it is a cyclical, continuous, and interactive development.

Burnett and Gardner (2006), based on interviews and analysis of visual material, suggested encounter, disorientation, reaction, independence and internalization stages.

Six phases/stages. Similar to Adler's model, Hammer, Bennett, and Wiseman (2003) viewed the adjustment from the perspective of intercultural sensitivity and described its process as six stages: denial, defense, minimization, acceptance, adaptation, and integration. The first three phases are viewed more "ethnocentric", since sojourners regard their own culture as central to reality; while the second three stages are defined as more "ethnorelative", as sojourners see their own culture in the context of other cultures. This model proposes a personal growth process that focuses on how cultural difference is experienced.

In summary, the stage/phase model divides the process of adjustment into different phases or stages. Church (1982) hold pointed out that this model "encounter inherent conceptual and methodological difficulties in classifying individuals" (p.542) and raised questions concerning such stage-model: whether sojourners have to follow order of stages? Whether sojourners must pass every single stage or they can also skip some stages? In addition, in order to discriminate the stages of adjustment, Church suggested defining the key indicators of each stage.

2.3.2 Curvilinear model

One of the most-discussed topics in exploring the process of adjustment over forty years is the U-shaped curve/ U-curve model, which holds that "the sojourner's level of adjustment as a function of time in the new culture" (Church, 1982, p.542). Lysgaard (1955) first put forward the U-shaped curve in 1955, based on a study of 200 Norwegian Fulbright grantees who once studied in the US. According to the model, adjustment "is felt to be easy and successful to begin with; then follows a 'crisis' in which one feels less well adjusted, somewhat lonely and unhappy; finally one begins to feel better adjusted again, becoming more integrated into the foreign community" (Lysgaard, 1955, p.51). It is worth noting that Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) later extended the U-shaped curve model as W-Curve (p.41) by including the reacculturation process of sojourner when they return home.

First, there is insufficient evidence to prove the existence of U-curve. In spite of the discussion of the U-curve model, there is limited scientific research available has so far proved its existence. For example, one research conducted by Zheng and Berry (1991) found that the results of Chinese sojourners' Cawte scores supported the U-curve hypothesis. Nevertheless, more research has failed to prove the existence of the U-curve. Kealey (1989) found only 10% of the participants reported that they experienced traditional U-curve cross-cultural adaptation, while other participants mentioned "the straight upward line of adjustment" (35%), stayed at the same level as pre-departure (10%), a high-stable level of adjustment (30%), or a low-stable-level (15%) (Kealey,

1989). In addition, a longitudinal study demonstrates a U-curve trend neither in psychological or in sociocultural measurements (Ward et al., 1998). Another empirical research in the UK indicated most international students reported that they encountered greatest problem in adjusting to sociocultural environment upon arrival in the UK suffered an initially tough and painful time in the first stage of their overseas study (Brown & Holloway, 2008)⁵⁷.

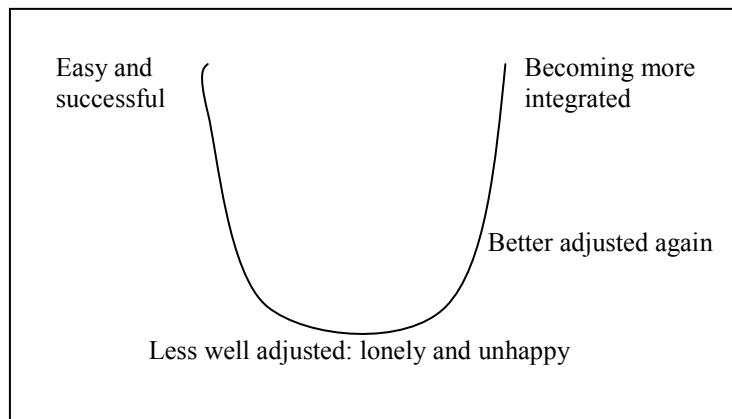


Figure 2-4: U-shaped curve of adjustment put forward by Lysgaard (1955)⁵⁸

Second, U-curve model oversimplifies the process of adjustment. In terms of U-curve model, the process of sojourner adjustment has been described as a linear development through different set of stages. This U-Curve model does, to some extent, bring us a possible hypothesis of process of the adjustment; nevertheless, the model does not provide us with much information about the reason that change happens from the “negotiation” period to the “adjustment”.

A conspicuously difference between “stage model” and “curvilinear model” is the former focus on describing the feature of each stage of the adjustment process, while the latter regards cultural adjustment as a continuum (Anderson, 1994).

2.3.3 *Learning/drive theory*

The learning model views adjustment as a learning process. Currently, three learning theories, namely, classic psychological learning theory, cognitive cross-cultural adjustment process theory, and cultural learning theory interpret the process of adjustment.

⁵⁷ Though it is true that international students were excited about their new life experience in the U.K., such cheerful mood was overwhelmed by more negative feelings which resulted from acculturative stress.

⁵⁸ The graph was drawn by the author according to the description of Lysgaard (1955).

Classic psychological learning model

Shaffer and Shoben (1956) described the adjustment process as “a series of steps, beginning when a need is felt and ending when that need is satisfied...” (p.9). Shaffer and Shoben (1956) depicted the adjustment process into details: first, a motive or need appears; second, some thwarting prevents the satisfaction; third, varied responses or behaviors were tried; fourth, some responses or behavior succeed; the need is satisfied (see Figure 2-5).

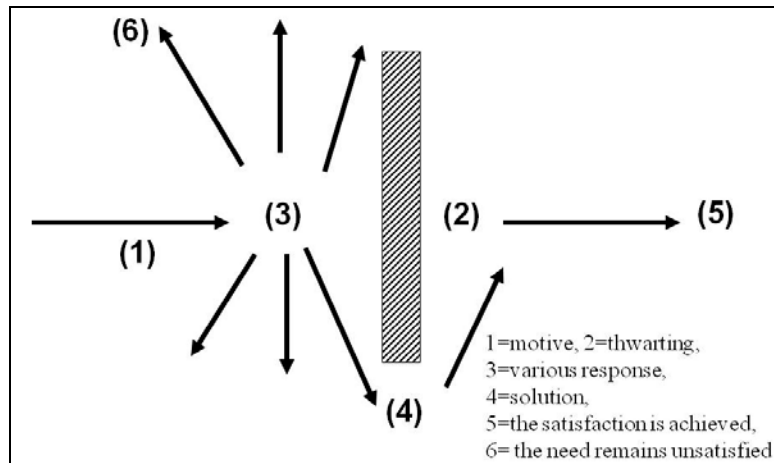


Figure 2-5: The psychological adjustment process
Source: Shaffer & Shoben, 1956, p.9

Cognitive cross-cultural adjustment process theory

Later, based on the psychological drive theory, Anderson (1994) introduced adaptation as “a recursive and cyclical problem-solving activity” (p.307) and put forward a cognitive cross-cultural adjustment process (see Figure 2-6). She emphasized the contributions from the individual’s thought processes, as “sojourners do not proceed through adjustment stages like hungry rats through a maze on the trail of the cheese. It is sojourners’ perception of events in the environment that drive their behavior” (Anderson, 1994, p.301-302). Individuals make various reactions to the new situation: “by changing the environment, by changing oneself, by doing nothing at all, or by walking away” (p.305). It is worth noting, both the psychological and the cognitive adjustment process depict “one cycle in the lifelong process” (Anderson, 1994, p.307) of adapting to environment.

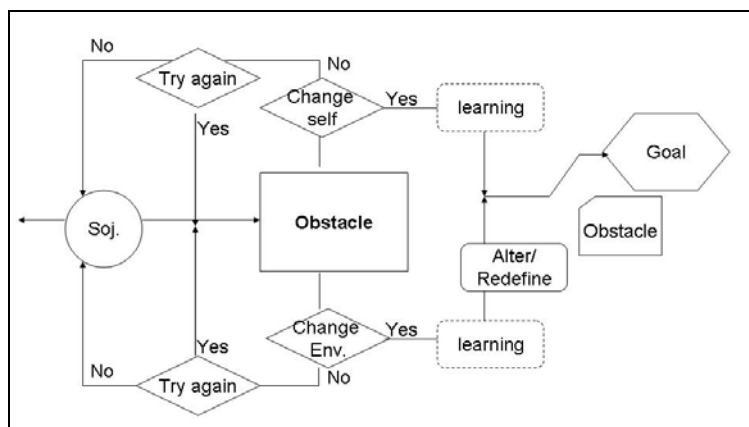


Figure 2-6: The cognitive cross-cultural adjustment process
Source: Anderson, 1994, p.306

Cultural learning theory

The culture learning model, having “its roots in social and experimental psychology” (Ward, 2004, p.186), views adjustment as a learning process as well. This model assumes that intercultural challenges results from the fact that new sojourners having difficulty in managing everyday social encounters; therefore, it highlights the importance of social skills and social interaction (Ward, 2004), and it is necessary to “learn the norms and rules of the new sociocultural system” (Brown & Holloway, 2008, p.234). One of the most frequently mentioned models is put forward by Bochner (1981), which assumes that culture learning involves the acquisition of both knowledge and skills about second culture practices as well as attitudes and feelings towards those practices.

2.3.4 Dynamic, cyclical and recursive model

The Stress-adaptation-growth Dynamics model

The Stress-adaptation-growth Dynamics proposed by Kim (1988) interprets the process of adjustment in a dynamic manner. Strangers’ cross-cultural experience is understood in a ‘draw-back-to-leap’ pattern, which is similar to the movement of a wheel (see Figure 2-7). The three-pronged model introduced “the dialectic of stress and adaptation” (Kim, 2007, p.248), as cross-cultural adaptation process involves both stressful and growth experience (p.80). Kim (2007) interpreted “each stressful experience is responded to by strangers with a ‘draw back’, which then activates their adaptive energy to help them reorganise themselves and ‘leap forward’” (p.56). Kim (1988) believed that “stressful experiences are most intense in the initial phase of the adaptation process, and that, as strangers become increasing functional in the host environment, their cross-cultural stress will be eased” (p.165), although the stress accompanies the adaptation through the whole process.

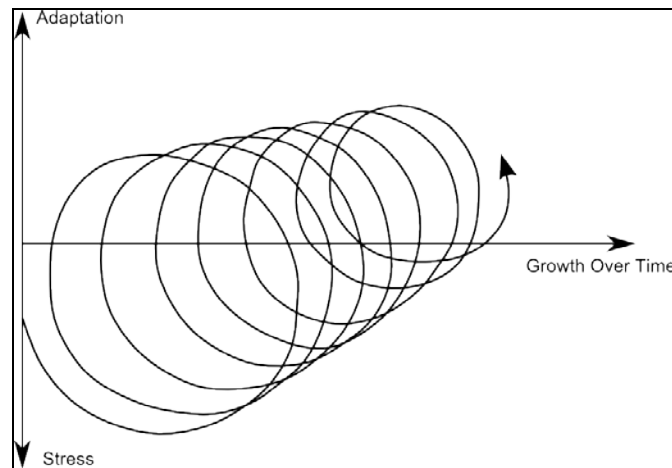


Figure 2-7: Stress-adaptation-growth dynamics
Source: Kim, 1988, p.56; Kim, 2007, p.249

There are two distinguishing attributes of stress-adaptation-growth model. First, this model is a rotative, recursive and circular process, which emphasizes the dynamic attribute of the concept of sojourner adjustment. In addition, this model emphasizes the correlation between the passage of time and a gradual decrease in acculturative stress (Brown & Holloway, 2008). Second, the dynamic stress-adaptation-growth model holds an optimistic attitude towards adjustment. Although “large and sudden changes are described as occurring more often during the initial phase of exposure to a new culture” (Kim, 2007, p.248), gradually, the degree and intensity of the stress slowly dies away and in contrast, the adaptation that individual achieves gradually increase.

Affective, cognitive and behavioral model

Anderson (1994) presented an “Affective, cognitive and behavioral” model of cross-cultural adaptation, which is based on sociopsychological adjustment theory (see Figure 2-8). Anderson (1994) held that all adjustment is a cyclical and recursive process of overcoming obstacles and solving problems in present-environment transactions. She vividly compared the process of adjustment to “a ferris wheel or roller-coaster ride, with depression and elation, successes and failures in overcoming obstacles providing the hills and valleys. It is cyclical in a dual sense, therefore, of involving both ups and downs and repetitive sequences” (p.307).

Anderson advocated that the successive periods of adaptation were composed of “Cultural Encounter”, “Obstacle”, “Response Generation” and “Overcoming”. Regarding “All human adjustment takes place along three dimensions - affective/emotional, cognitive/perceptual, and (overt) behavioral” (p.308)⁵⁹, Anderson (1994) held “different obstacles will produce different sets of cognitive, affective, and

⁵⁹ Anderson (1994) believed that these three dimensions may be in synchronization in the adjustment process, and in terms of the interrelationship of these dimensions. She further explained the interrelationship among these three dimensions: one mediating, potentiating, or accompanying the other, although they may also be at war, producing dissonance and conflicts within the individual. A third possibility: three dimensions were quite independent of each other.

behavior events and responses” (p.309). Anderson further emphasized that: although cognitive, affective, and behavioural dimensions are separated in terms of concept, in the process of sojourner adjustment, these three dimensions interpenetrate. In addition, Anderson regarded the “endpoint” of the adjustment as a continuum rather than a point, and divides the sojourner into six discrete categories: returnees, escapers, beavers, time servers, adjusters and participators, according to the response and overcoming.

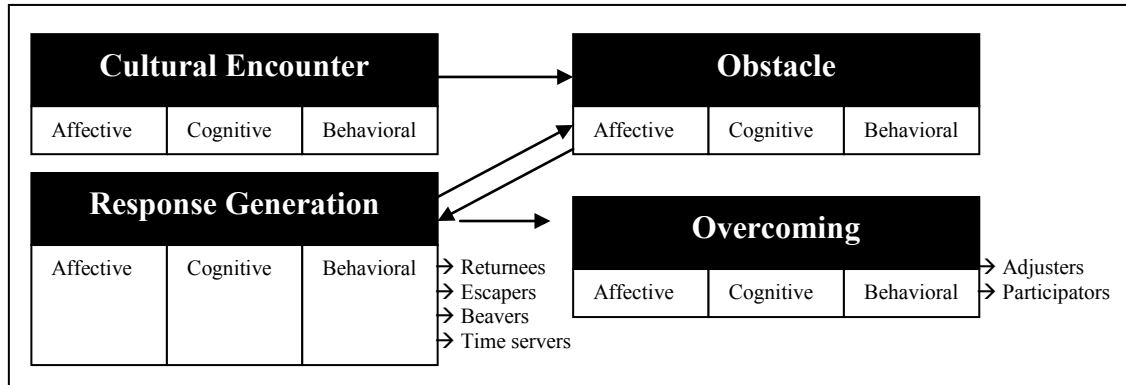


Figure 2-8: Model of affective, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions⁶⁰
Source: Anderson, 1994, p.310-311

In terms of application, some empirical studies apply Anderson’s theory. Lewthwaite (1996) applied Anderson’s model to investigate international students experience and adapt to the new academic, social, cultural and linguistic milieu. Similarly, by using Anderson’s model, Barker and Jones (1999) examines the academic adjustment and learning processes of international and local first-year students. Anderson’s model of cross-cultural adjustment dwells on “the interrelationship of adjustment and learning processes” (Ramsay, Barker, & Jones, 1999, p.129). Compared with Kim’s stress-adaptation-growth model, Anderson’s affective, cognitive and behavioural model is operable. Based on these attributes of the dynamic process and interactive of adjustment, the conceptual backdrop for this research will use Anderson’s affective, cognitive and behavioural model.

In summary, both Kim’s stress-adaptation-growth model and Anderson’s emphasize the dynamic, cyclical and recursive attributes of adjustment. Anderson (1994) advocates cross-cultural adjustment is “a dialectical process” (p.321). In addition, previous research focuses more on the stressful experience, and views adaptation as problem; while both Kim and Anderson emphasis that the obstacle not just generates panic and confusion, but also stimulate a confident, hopeful, coping reaction within the same individual as well, which later stimulates individuals’ personal growth and development.

⁶⁰ The figure here is a simplified version adapted from Anderson’s (1994) original figure.

2.3.5 A communication model of cross-cultural adaptation

Kim (1988) put forward communication model of cross-cultural adaptation. She views cross-cultural adaptation as a dynamic communication process, and sojourners interact with a given cultural environment in *open systems*. According to the communication model, the “individual and the host environment are considered to co-determine the course and outcome of the adaptation process through various communication activities” (Kim, 1988, p.9). In addition, Kim’s model integrates various research areas such as communication, anthropology, sociology, social psychology, as well as other disciplines.

As shown in Figure 2-9, Kim (1988) held that sojourners communicate with both host and ethnic culture in the host environment, in both interpersonal and mass communication level⁶¹: in terms of the host social communication, Kim (1988) regarded “adaptive transformation occurs in and through such communication activities, which, in turn, facilitate learning of all other aspects of the host culture including its economic, social, political and aesthetic dimensions” (p.63). In terms of ethnic social communication, it “serves the adaptive process by compensating for the lack of host communication competence and host social communication” (p.65).

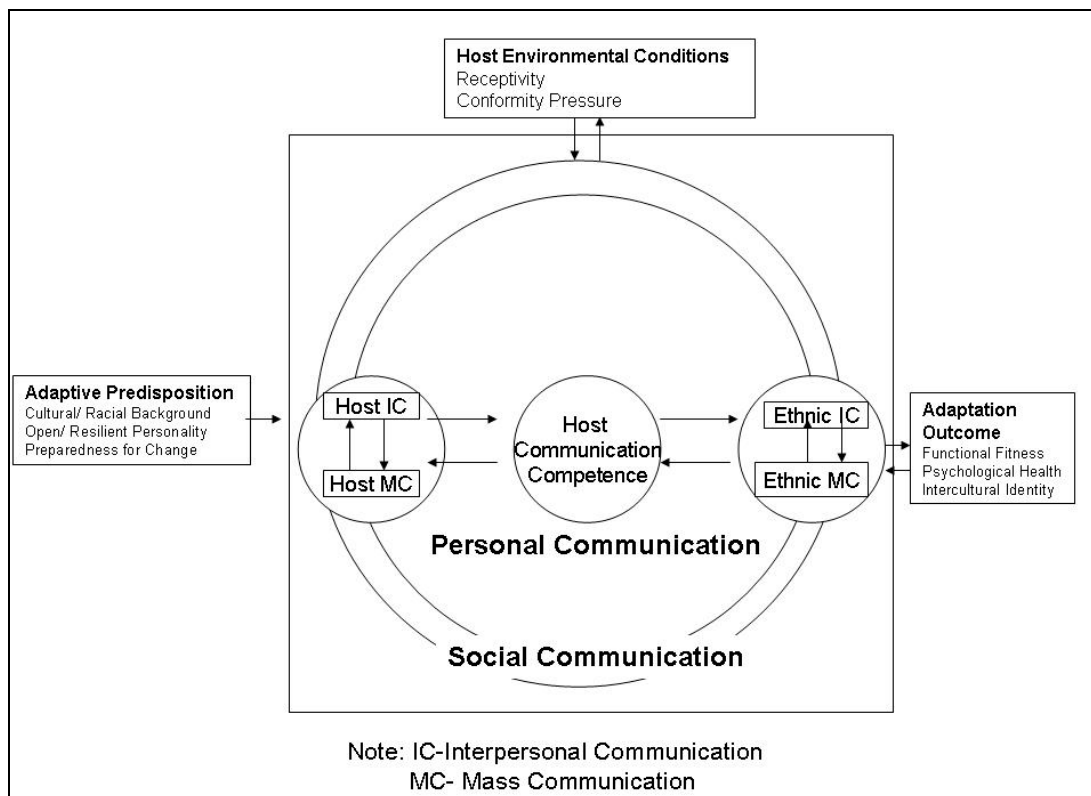


Figure 2-9: A communication model of cross-cultural adaptation
Source: Kim, 1988, p.79

⁶¹ In addition, Kim’s opinion on dimensions of communication was inspired by Brent Ruben and she categorized the dimensions of communication into two: personal and social communication. They are “closely interrelated, inseparable communication processes” (Kim, 1988, p.59).

In terms of application, Kim's theory has been widely used in the research on international students. Liu (2001) held that Kim's communication model can be applied to the cross-cultural adaptation process of international students in the host country, as international students have to improve the communicative competence on and off campus in the host country. Some research extends and offers empirical evidence for Kim's integrative theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation: Zhong (1996) applied Kim's model and conducted an ethnographic study, aimed at examining the cultural adaptation process of the Chinese students and scholars in America. Zhao (2007) further extended Kim's model and emphasized the intercultural adaptation process between Chinese students and their British lecturers and peer student in the UK is in a two-way manner. Pitts's (2009) investigation also extended and offered empirical evidence for Kim's integrative theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation, which explained and described American overseas students' experience of adjustment.

2.3.6 Conclusions: each theory holds a piece of the puzzle

Based on the above literature review on model of adjustment, we will identify the complexity of the adjustment process. The above models of adjustment process/ pattern stem from various research areas (psychology, sociology, etc.); therefore, each model bears its own features and attributes. Anderson (1994) vividly described each of these models holds "a piece of the puzzle, individually none is fully satisfactory to account for the process of cross-cultural adaptation" (p.296). Furthermore, some scholars suggested an integrated theoretical framework incorporating some of the major approaches of adjustment (e.g. Kim, 1988), while others highly valued the dynamic feature and process of adjustment (e.g. Church, 1982).

The result of different empirical research proves the unpredictable and dynamic process of adjustment, as Brown and Holloway (2008) pointed out that different sojourners experience different adjustment process, depending on the host of individual, cultural, and external factors. Pearson-Evans (2006) echoed their opinion and indicated that "no two individuals' characteristics and no two host culture contexts are exactly the same, with the result that adjustment processes and outcomes are highly individual and subjective" (p.53). In addition, Zhou and Todman (2009) emphasized "the frequency of difficulties relating to general life, social life, and study life each changed over time and that the pattern of changes differed" (p.15).

2.4 Academic adjustment in focus

Tsang (2001) suggested that current empirical studies of international adjustment can be categorized into two groups, namely, (i) adjustment of expatriates (their family member as well) who go abroad to fulfill overseas assignments and (ii) adjustment of international students studying overseas. First, with the increasing globalization of

industries and business operations, multinational organizations send their managerial employees on expatriate assignments to develop global competencies; however, not many companies have successful experience in selecting, supporting and retaining effective managers in international assignments (Black & Gregersen, 1991). Based on this background, scholars exert themselves to find out the causes of the failure, so as to improve the adjustment of expatriates' adjustment on successful expatriate. The term *international adjustment* (Black, Mendenhall, and Oddou, 1991) involves work adjustment, adjustment to interacting with host-country nationals, and general adjustment (Black, 1988). Second, against the background that more students pursuing a tertiary education in other countries (whose system is often not identity with one's home country), their learning experience abroad gradually receives more attention in the current research on adjustment.

Klein et al., (1971) held that previous "research focused on a special array of problems unique to foreign students (such as culture shock) may be potentially misleading or misguided" (p.80). Because of student identity, studies on adjustment of international students very seldom adopt the term "culture shock", instead, variables such as academic performance and satisfaction, problems and satisfaction with the personal and social aspects of the sojourn, degree of social interaction with host nationals, and various outcomes of the sojourn experience, and personal growth and academic achievement are preferred (Church, 1982).

Definition

Previous research on *academic adjustment* concerns the development of both children (Reynolds, Weissberg, & Kaspro, 1992) and adolescents (Rhodes, Grossman, & Resch, 2000). Current research on *academic adjustment* (or *educational adaptation* (Zhou, 2009)) focuses on two main broad themes: academic adjustment of children and academic adjustment of college students (Baker & Siryk, 1984). In addition, in order to differentiate the adjustment of international students from other sojourner group, some scholars use the term "*student sojourner*" (Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002; Martin, 1986; Martin, 1987; Pitts, 2009; Rohrlach & Martin, 1991).

Ramsay, Barker and Jones (1999) defined *academic adjustment* as "[...] the fit which students achieve with the academic context, [...] a complex process which impacts on all university students" (p.129). In the current literature on international students, the following perceptions, namely, *academic adjustment*, *academic performance*, *academic competence*, and *academic achievement*⁶² are frequently referred. Although some research used the above terms at a random, these terms have different definitions and refer to various concepts.

⁶² Academic achievement is defined as "many aspects of students' accomplishments in schools, including progress in core academic subjects [...] as well as in subjects that are emphasized less frequently in contemporary curricula" (Smelser & Baltes, 2001, p.9).

Discrimination

It is worth noting that the term *academic adjustment* in this thesis specifically refers to the academic adjustment of international students at a foreign university. International students are expected to have novel learning experience in a new education setting. Church (1982) holds that “the primary goals of many foreign students are academic; one would expect adjustment for these sojourners to be influenced by academic adjustment and performance” (p.550-551). Zhou and Todman (2009) explicitly point out that “the course of adaptation differs between the study domain and other domains (general and social life)” (p.18). Taking the student identity into consideration, foreign student’s adjustment at the university is one important factor differentiates them from other sojourners.

First, academic adjustment is more than academic achievement. Klein and her colleagues (1971) suggested that successful academic performance didn’t necessarily promise the ideal academic adjustment and they doubted whether a seemingly “ideal” (or straight-A) student was an excellent student, as he might lead a lonely life and concentrate only on his studies and be isolated from the host culture. Selby and Woods (1996) and Gerdes and Mallinckrodt (1994) supported their opinions and pointed that “the broader concept of academic adjustment involves more than simply a student’s scholarly potential” (p.281). In spite of that, international students’ overall academic performance should not be looked down upon, as students who fail the study abroad cannot be regarded as academic adjusted. Woods (1966) suggested academic success was one of the major determinants of student adjustment at a “high pressure” institution.

Second, academic adjustment doesn’t mean that international students have to abandon their original student identity. Bochner (1972) clearly stated that successful acculturation does not necessarily mean that international students have to force themselves to behave as the home students or accept all values in the host society; while he suggested “a comprehension of the rules that govern social intercourse in Australia, and some facility in playing the game according to the rules” (p.67-68). McLeod (1981) also criticized the trend that several studies judging adjustment of international students’ by simply focusing on whether they lead “American way of life” (p.44).

Furthermore, researchers have emphasized the multiple criteria of academic adjustment. Klein and her associates (1971) criticized that a large number of studies of international students’ adaption “simplistically focused either on superficial indices of academic adjustment or on the development of knowledge of positive attitudes toward the United States as criteria for success” (p.79). They further suggested the necessity of covering various aspects of adaptation in research design: “completion of educational and professional goals, development of positive, friendly contacts with Americans, successful career placement, a continued sense of confidence, health, and well-being, and the emergence of differentiated and detailed perspectives on American life” (p.79). Gu, Schweisfurth, and Day (2010) also found the intercultural adaptation presents “a complex set of shifting associations between language mastery, social interaction,

personal development and academic outcomes” (p.20). In addition, Heublein and his colleagues (2004) put forward the idea of the effective foreign study: “a high efficiency of overseas studying is achieved when international students manage the study within short period of time, get high quote of academic success and obtain distinctive satisfaction in learning” (p.23).

In summary, the definition of academic adjustment and the assessment of international students are interrelated. Reviewing the above literature on international students’ academic adjustment, we will identify several points are important to define the academic adjustment of international students: (1) fulfill the academic task and finally complete the study; (2) develop good relationship with domestic students and academic staff; (3) hold a positive attitude towards the learning environment and the host culture; (4) achieve self-confidence and intercultural competence in the host learning environment. Although these four areas cover a multiple criteria of assessment, it still has its weakness. First, it is worth mentioning that these criteria only apply to graduates, who have completed the overseas study; while not suit to those international students who are still pursuing the studies. Second, considering the fact that adjustment is a process, international students are expected to achieve progress in different phase respectively. Klein and her associates (1971) suggested “not to label any one style as good or bad, but to understand their short- and long-term implications especially in light of the basic processes of adaptation and attitude change involved (p.80)”.

Based on the above discussion, in this thesis, academic adjustment of Chinese /international students is defined as: (1) from the academic perspective, gradually, they are aware of the academic culture between home university and host university, and adopt necessary strategy (making necessary modification of their learning style in order to fulfill the expectation in the host learning environment) to cope with the difficulty caused by the difference, and fulfill various academic task both at class (engaged in participating in the discussion, interacting with lecturers and other classmates) and after-class (group work and homework), and pass the academic assessment (tests and examinations); (2) in terms of intercultural communication, they establish a good relationship with host students and academic staff. They make efforts in improving their foreign language proficiency, so that, gradually, language does not become a big obstacle when they participate in different academic activity (both spoken and written language) or communicate with host students and lecturers; (3) through the experience of overcoming difficulty in the intercultural learning milieu, they develop self-confidence and achieve personal growth and educational development.

3. RESEARCH ON INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS: HISTORY AND CURRENT DEBATE

History of survey on international students can be traced back to almost 100 years ago. As early as in 1915, Committee on Friendly Relations among Foreign students started conducting annual census of foreign students and later in 1921, the Institute of International Education (IIE) worked together with the Committee in circulating the census questionnaire (Du Bois, 1956). Later, substantial empirical studies have contributed tremendously to the research in the late 1950s and 1960s on adaptation of foreign students at foreign universities (Aich, 1963; Du Bois, 1956; Galtung, 1965; Selby & Woods, 1966; Selltiz et al., 1963; Sewell & Davidsen, 1961; Terhune, 1964).

Reviewing the literature on international students, we will find: research method and research theme are two main focuses. In terms of research method, based on classic cross-cultural adjustment theory, scholars either use quantitative methods (instruments, index or inventories) to measure the adjustment of international students, or adopt qualitative (ethnographic) methods, or a mixed research method to depict the process and the transition/change of their adjustment. As far as the themes of the research are concerned, international students' learning and intercultural communication (on- and off-campus) have been the focus of the research.

3.1 *Landscape of research on international students*

The landscape of current research covers international students' pre-departure situation (motivation, pre-departure preparation, and previous intercultural experience), studying experience (difficulties in general and specific academic difficulty), psychological situation (academic stress and cultural and acculturative stress), and intercultural communication (current situation, reasons for reduced intercultural communication, friendship patterns and benefit of intercultural communication). The factors influencing adjustment of international students will also be reviewed at the end.

3.1.1 *Background: national-wide research on international students*

Countries hosting a large number of international students, such as the US, the UK, Germany, Australia, and New Zealand, have conducted large-scale surveys to better understand the current situation (reasons of choosing the host country, learning experience, financing and living, satisfaction, whether international students will recommend the host country to their friends in the home country, etc.).

Such national-wide surveys on international students have some attributes: First, the national-based survey is on a large scale and a large number of international students

participate in the questionnaire. Table 3-1 shows the number of the sample of the national survey. For example, the latest *International Student Survey in Australia* successfully received as many as 36,308 responses, which accounts for 25% of the total international students' number in Australia⁶³ and covers 34 universities out of 39 universities participated in the survey. In addition, such national-wide survey on a large scale covers international students registered in different levels/ forms of higher education. In the UK, there were 4,580 responses from 116 higher education institutions (HEIs) and 216 responses from 65 colleges of further education (FE). In New Zealand, the sample included university students (42%), ITP students (16%), PTE / ELS (25%) and 467 (17%) secondary school students.

Table 3-1: National-wide survey on international students in the main hosting countries

Country	Themes	Topics	No. of samples
UK	<i>Broadening our Horizons: international students in UK universities and colleges (2004)</i>	(1) The academic experience (2) Students' concerns about studying in the UK (3) Pre-arrival information and support services (4) Finance and hardship (5) Employment, immigration and the "official welcome" (6) Accommodation (7) Social integration, leisure and students' perceptions of the UK (8) Students' overall satisfaction with their stay in the UK	4,796
Australia	<i>International Student Survey (2010)</i>	(1) Overall satisfaction (2) Satisfaction with support on arrival (3) Satisfaction with living in Australia (4) Satisfaction with the studying in Australia (5) Satisfaction with support services (6) Factors influencing the choice of where to study	36,308
New Zealand	<i>Experiences of international students in New Zealand: Report 2007, on the results of the national survey</i>	(1) Making a choice about where to study (2) Living arrangements (3) Educational experiences (4) Services & facilities (5) Support or help might receive in New Zealand (6) Relationships with people in New Zealand (7) Life in New Zealand (8) Future Plans	2,677
Germany	<i>Internationalization of Higher education- Foreign students in Germany -German students Abroad (2008)</i>	(1) Structural characteristics of studies for foreigners (2) Personal characteristics (3) Previous education and motives for studying in Germany (4) Living situation in Germany (Financing living expenses, gainful employment, housing and living conditions, eating at student cafeterias) (5) Germany as a place to study	1,870
France	<i>Foreign students in France (2007)</i>	(1) University environment and living conditions (housing, financial situation); (2) Social relations (3) Cultural life outside university.	1, 715

Note: the above table is compiled by the author.

⁶³ According to Australian Education International (AEI), between March and May 2010, there were about 143,000 international students studying in Australian universities. Retrieved April 20, 2011 from http://www.aei.gov.au/research/Publications/Documents/2010_International_Student_Report.pdf

Source: UK: UKCOSA, 2004; Australia: AEI, 2010; Germany: Isserstedt & Link, 2008; New Zealand: Researched for the Ministry of Education by Deloitte, 2008; France: Observatoire national de la Vie Etudiante, 2007.

Second, since the national-wide research aims at having an overview of international students' academic experience and daily life in the host country⁶⁴, questionnaires are adopted, students of different nationalities are included as group, instead of as individuals. Therefore, width, instead of depth, is the focus of such survey. Topics/content of the survey covers most of issues that closely related to international students: pre-departure information (motivation, choice of the host country) academic experience abroad (time commitments and academic difficulty), language proficiency, living experience (accommodation, financial situation, leisure time, and part-time job), intercultural communication with domestic students, social integration, overall satisfaction (support, service and facilities), etc.

Third, host countries regularly redo the questionnaire, so as to follow the change of the international students' responses. For instance, Germany undertakes the national-wide survey on international students with an average 3 year of time interval, namely, in 2002, 2005, 2008 and 2010 respectively. In New Zealand, the survey was taken in 2004 and 2007 respectively. Results collected in a regular period enable the researchers compare and follow the new trend of international students.

3.1.2 Pre-departure

Compared with research on international students' learning experience and intercultural communication, studies on their pre-departure status (motivation, readiness, and previous intercultural experience) have not attracted much attention in the previous literature (Gong & Chang, 2007).

Motivation

In most cases, international students and their families have multifaceted, instead of one-fold, interests and concerns in studying abroad.⁶⁵ A review of "push and pull" factors will help us to better understand the reasons behind their decision. Lee (1966), based on theory of migration, put forwarded the factor that encourage and repel the migration respectively. Inspired by push and pull factors and other empirical research, Altbach, Kelly, and Lulat (1985) summarized the key push and pull factors among international students (see Table 3-2).

Similar to the research in the last decades, the motivation for many international students is to improve their professional chances at home country by studying abroad,

⁶⁴ Such national-wide survey is often conducted by national institutions in charging of international students.

⁶⁵ For instance, Zeilinger (2006) pointed out that there were multifaceted motivations among Asian students studying in Germany;

although some international students⁶⁶ regarded their studies as “preliminary to emigration” (Altbach, Kelly, & Lulat, 1985, p.12). Students firmly believe that an overseas experience promises a good job opportunity after completing their studies abroad. Another survey undertaken in the US indicated the career-oriented motivation, as students hope to enhance future career opportunities and gaining experience for future employment are major contributing factors in a student’s decision to study abroad (Obst & Forster, 2006).⁶⁷ Moreover, Zeilinger (2006) differentiated international students’ intrinsic motivations (e.g. real interest of culture and language of the host country) from extrinsic ones (e.g. regarding the host country as a spring board into further careers).

Table 3-2: Push and pull factors affecting the personal decision to study abroad by third world students

Push Factors:		Pull Factors:	
Key variables pertaining to Home-country		Key variables pertaining to Host-country	
1	Availability of scholarships for study abroad.	1	Availability of scholarships to international students.
2	Poor quality educational facilities.	2	Good quality education.
3	Lack of research facilities.	3	Availability of advanced research facilities.
4	Lack of appropriate education facilities.	4	Availability of advanced research facilities with likely offer of admission.
5	Failure to gain admission to local institution(s).	5	Presence of relatives willing to provide financial assistance.
6	Enhanced value (in the market place) of a foreign degree.	6	Congenial political situation.
7	Discrimination against minorities.	7	Congenial socio-economic and political environment to migrate to.
8	Politically uncongenial situation.	8	Opportunity for general international life experience.

Source: Altbach, Kelly, & Lulat, 1985, p.13

In addition, motivation of international students from industrialized nations differed from those from developing countries: as the former are motivated to achieve personal and cultural experience (e.g. receive linguistic training, cultural enrichment or different living experience), while the latter for political and economic reasons (Altbach, Kelly, & Lulat, 1985). For instance, an Australian anthropologist found the similar motivation among Indian students coming to Australia was not for the academic reputation of Australian universities, while they were attracted by the possibility of applying for permanent residence after graduation (Baas, 2006).

⁶⁶ Aich (1963) identified that the reason for international students from Egypt, India, Ghana, Nigeria, Indonesia, Jordan and Iran coming to Germany was not for its research or scientific reputation, but for its relative easier admission requirement (58%), comparing with their home country, 14% chose Germany out of political reason, while only 1 out of 100 participants came to Germany for its academic reputation (Der Spiegel, 1962, December 26).

⁶⁷ The survey included international students at 24 institutions in the United States, including large research institutions, small liberal arts colleges, and community colleges. The 420 survey respondents represented every region of the world and were representative of the overall diversity of the international student population in the United States.

Pre-departure preparation

Foreign language proficiency. One of the most frequently discussed indicators of successful adjustment is international students' foreign language proficiency. Previous research indicates the acquisition of the host language facilitating sojourners' participation in the new environment and a good mastery of the host language promotes a have better academic achievement and performance (Kim, 1988). However, so far, current studies fail to achieve conclusive results whether the ability of English language proficiency can predict academic success or adjustment. Nevertheless, Pearson-Evans (2006) argued that "High language skills provided potential for deeper communication with host culture members, but did not automatically facilitate adjustment" (p.52).

Knowledge of the host country and its educational system. Before arrival, a good knowledge of the host country (culture, custom and convention, weather, etc.) and its educational system increases international students' confidence and later benefit in the adjustment. International students' prior knowledge of norms, customs, and values of the host country contributed to their adjustment (Church, 1982; Kim, 1988, Pruitt, 1978).

Previous intercultural experience. Compared with studies on motivation of international students studying abroad, themes of previous intercultural experience receive less attention. Based on an 11-country study of university exchange students, Klineberg and Hull (1979) indicated that international students who had had overseas travel experience (for at least a month) or prior foreign experiences and social contact with people local to the host culture tended to have fewer problems in establishing contacts in the host country, which enhanced international students' adjustment.

3.1.3 Studying experience

Difficulties in general

The problems that challenge international students were first acknowledged by two Christian associations 68 in the United States in 1922 (Wheeler, King, & Davidson, 1925). Committees organized by these two associations conducted a Survey of Foreign Students, in order to obtain data concerning the problems foreign students faced during their stays in the United States in details. The commission cited seven major problems concerning international students' adjustment: (i) academic or curriculum issues; (ii) language; (iii) economic problem; (iv) housing difficulties; (v) inability to be socially accepted; (vi) health and recreation; and (vii) racial prejudice (Wheeler, King, & Davidson, 1925). In addition, based on a large amount of literature review, Church (1982) has divided the common problems that international students encounter into

⁶⁸ Two Christian associations are International Committee of the Young Men's Christian Association and the National Board of the Young Women's Christian Association (Wheeler, King, & Davidson, 1925).

three types: (i) academic problems; (ii) personal problems; and (iii) sociocultural problems (see Table 3-3).

Table 3-3: Frequent problems mentioned by foreign students

Academic Problems
Language Need to delay educational goals while studying host language Written and oral reports Understanding lectures Culture-bound professional vocabulary Placement Inadequate prior preparation Inadequate academic orientation, advice Inadequate placement or credit for previous coursework Selection of institution and coursework Adjustment to new educational system Frequent exams and assignments Classroom and professor/student informality Competitiveness Grading methods Credit system
Personal Problems
Loneliness Homesickness Depression Arrival confusion Maintaining self-esteem Lack of personal guidance and counseling Overambitious goals to succeed Inappropriate motivations for overseas study Somatic complaints Family problems or loss of loved ones Time pressure Decision to stay or return home Religious problems Staying current with events at home Adjusting to food, climate Financial/employment problems Financial difficulties Housing difficulties (cost, noise, privacy, getting along with roommates) Difficulties obtaining employment Concern over employment opportunities on return home Visa, immigration problems
Sociocultural Problems
Adjusting to social customs and norms Contrasting or conflicting values and assumptions Balancing simultaneous culture group memberships Defining role as a foreign student Ignorance of host nationals about home culture Political upheaval at home Difficulty making social contacts Problems with verbal and nonverbal communication Superficial American friendships Racial discrimination Dating and sexual problems

Source: Church, 1982, p.572

International and domestic students encounter similar difficulties. Before discussing the difficulties that international students encounter in particular, it is necessary to point out that not only international students face adjustment issues, but domestic students as well (Evans, Carlin, & Potts, 2009). Bochner (1972) held that both international students and local students need to adjust to the demands of being a college or university student. As far as academic difficulties are concerned, domestic freshman also experience the transition from secondary education to tertiary one by settling into the new academic environments (Sovic, 2009); while in terms of social situations, similar to their international counterparts, the host nationals (especially those who are new to the urban environment) encounter many social difficulties (Barker et al., 1991). Take the household task cooking and laundry as an example, domestic students are expected to meet similar problems (Turner, 2002).

Problems challenge international students particularly. Bochner (1972) concluded the problems challenging overseas students into four categories, based on their different roles abroad: as a foreigner living in an unfamiliar environment; as a university student facing different unfamiliar demands by every new university student; as an adolescent encountering puzzles that on the way being an adult; as a representative of home country. Problems reported by international students in coping with US education, cultural differences, and language challenges (Zhai, 2002) seldom challenge domestic students. By moving out of the familiar “cultural comfort zone” (Kingston & Forland, 2008, p.211) and entering into a brand new educational milieu, international students encounter difficulty in the new social and academic milieu.

Empirical research exploring the current learning experience between international students and local students indicate that international have more problems in adapting to the university than domestic students. A longitudinal study undertaken in the US found that international students, compared with their domestic counterparts, had greater difficulty in adjusting to the university at the beginning (Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002). Other studies in Australia found that first-year international students reported more stress and anxiety (Ramsay, Barker, & Jones, 1999) and felt less adjusted to university than their domestic counterpart (Ramsay, Jones & Barker, 2007). Kaczmarek et al. (1994) found international students had more problems than native peer in social and institutional attachment, and had a more difficult time seeking the appropriate type of assistance. Compared with local students, many international students reported they encounter more difficulties in terms of time management, study, revision and examination skills; using the foreign language of the host country; joining in discussion or cultural values relating to questioning authority figures (Burns, 1991).⁶⁹ In addition to the students’ own opinion, lecturers in the host country observed that the mastery of foreign language, social interaction with home students, intercultural adaptation, and achieving academic goals are the main challenge to international students (Trice, 2003). Furthermore, some problems are common to all foreign students, who come from

⁶⁹ Surprisingly, Zhao, Kuh and Carini (2005)’s research indicated that international students were more engaged in some areas than American students were -- particularly in the first year of college.

different cultural, religious and educational background (McAdam, 1972), while Church (1982) pointed out “students from different cultures, however, differ in the degree to which they experience certain problems” (p.54).

Academic difficulty

Language problem. Studies concerning difficulties challenging international students will first mention their language difficulty. International students also regard foreign language as the most common academic stressor (Lin & Yi, 1997). It is important to notice that even those international who speak the same language (e.g., English spoken in the US, the UK, Australia, New Zealand, or Ireland; or German spoken in Germany, Austria, or Switzerland) encounter some language difficulty (e.g. idioms, accent, etc.), not to mention international students who speak another foreign language.

To international students, foreign language skills first affect various aspects of their academic life: reading and writing skill, understanding and participation in the class (Evans, Carlin, & Potts, 2009; Barker et al., 1991). Second, empirical research suggests that foreign language proficiency affects international students’ intercultural communication competence (Nishida, 1985), social lives, and understanding of the host culture (Pan et al., 2008). International students who believe their English was adequate reported fewer academic difficulties (Xu, 1991) and perceiving less academic stress (Wan, Chapman, & Biggs, 1992). Moreover, lecturers also emphasize the influence of foreign language on international students’ success in the host country (Trice, 2003).

Adjustment to new educational system. As mentioned above, one attribute differentiates international students from other sojourners is their student identity. In addition to the language difficulty, empirical research on international students indicates that they are unfamiliar with the academic ritual or educational system in the host country. International students often do not understand the rules that apply in specific social or academic situation (Barker. et al, 1991). For instance, international students are not familiar with lecture style (expected classroom behavior, the use of discussion sections, learning and teaching methods, and patterns of classroom interactions), assignment (the type and quantity of work that is required), assessment and the grading system, study regulation, and relationship between students and lecturers (Campbell & Li, 2007; Ehlers & Hemmingsen, 2011; Evans, Carlin, & Potts, 2009; Griffiths, Winstanley, & Gabriel, 2005; Li, Chen, & Duanmu, 2010, p.394; Maxwell, 1974).

Unsuccessful learning experience: dropout. An unsuccessful overseas learning experience leads to dropout.⁷⁰ A wide range of terms is utilized to describe such situation. Interestingly, each country has its own preference or tradition in using the

⁷⁰ Some research uses positive terms such as “retention”, “persistence”, “graduation rates”, “withdrawal” and “student success”; while other applies terms such as “drop-out” or “failure rate”, which is to some extent, in a negative manner. Retrieved November 11, 2011 from <http://evidencenet.pbworks.com/w/page/19383519/Student%20Retention%20and%20Success>

term, for example, “student retention” is more frequently used in the UK⁷¹ and the US (Evans, Carlin, & Potts, 2009). In spite of the variety term of dropout, surprisingly, very little data on international student retention is available on a national base, as “international student retention statistics are not typically provided in government higher education reports” (Evans, Carlin, & Potts, 2009, p.32). For example, in the UK, one only knows the national drop-out rate among all students is of 21% (Loveys, 2011)⁷², and “among students starting full-time first degrees in the UK in 2008-09, the proportion who had dropped out a year later was 7.9 per cent” (Attwood, 2011)⁷³; while specific statistics of international students’ drop-out rate is not available. Evans, Carlin, and Potts (2009) attributed such little data to the low ratio of international students on campus (as international students make up less than 4% of the entire student population) and ignorant attitude towards international students.

Another exception is one research conducted in the US. Andrade (2009) introduced the retention rate between international and all students in the US, based on the previous research^{74 75}.

In spite the difficulties that international students encounter above, international students in the US seem to achieve even slight better than their American counterparts. Andrade (2009) further attributed this to the numerous programs developed by host institutions, as they attach importance to the adjustment of international students.

Table 3-4: Persistence and Graduation Rates- International Students and All Students

	International students	All students
First-Year Persistence		
2006-07 (Hayes, 2007)	80.2%	80.1%
Six-Year Graduation 1999		
Freshman Cohort (NCAA, 2006)	59%	57%
Six-Year graduation 1999		
Freshman Cohort (Hayes, 2007)	58.7%	57.8%

Source: Andrade, 2009, p.8

Scope and intensity of difficulties. First, duration of problems varies. Some problems are short-term and can be solved after their arrival (Hammer, 1992), while others are long-lasting. In terms of short-term problems, before arriving in a new country, international students are worried about problems: how to find an accommodation and get registered at the university? These problems are urgent; however, after arrival, international students are able to obtain more information; therefore, such problems can be easily dealt with. Regarding the long-lasting difficulties such as language and

⁷¹ Retrieved November 11, 2011 from The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

http://www.hesa.ac.uk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2072&Itemid=141

⁷² Retrieved November 11, 2011 from <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1371989/Scandal-college-drop-outs-Record-numbers-students-failing-finish-degrees.html>

⁷³ Retrieved November 11, 2011 from

<http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storycode=415740>

⁷⁴ Hayes, R. (2007). 2006-07 CSRDE retention report: the retention and graduation rates of 1999-2005 entering baccalaureate degree-seeking freshmen cohorts in 438 colleges and universities. Norman, OK: Consortium for the Study of Retention Data Exchange.

⁷⁵ National Collegiate Athletic Association (NACC).

sociocultural problems, they might accompany some international students throughout their overseas experience. Church (1982) pointed out that “problems reported by foreign students in a variety of host countries have remained essentially the same over the last 30 years” (p.54); reviewing the problems that *Survey of Foreign Students* conducted in the U.S in 1922 (Wheeler, King, & Davidson, 1925), we will identify that those problems challenging international students 90 years ago still challenge international students today. Take foreign language skill as an example: one-third international students studying in Germany reported that they were challenged by the language difficulties during the entire study in Germany (Danckwortt, 1984, p.24). Nevertheless, their academic-based German language (understanding the lectures, talk in the seminar, and academic writing) gradually improves (Heublein, 2009, p.76). Chinese students indicate the longer they are in Germany, the less difficulty they will come across. Only 17% Chinese students who study 1-2 years in Germany regard their German as “very good or good”, while for those students studying in Germany for 3-4 years, the percentage increases to 22.2%, and for those Chinese students who study 5-7 years in Germany, 100% of them regard their German language as “very good or good” (Guan, 2007).

Table 3-5: Initial and stubborn difficulty based on daily life and academic situation

	initial difficulty	“stubborn” difficulty
daily life based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ finding accommodation↓ ▪ get orientation↓ ▪ getting registration at the university and the city hall↓ ▪ foreign language (1)↓ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ intercultural contact with fellow students↘ ▪ financial difficulty↘ ▪ foreign language (2) ↘
academic-based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ recognition of the previous academic achievement↓ ▪ registration (as a student)↓ ▪ choice of courses↓ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ writing↘ ▪ reading↘

Note 1: Table is compiled by the author. Symbol “↓” indicates short-term problems, while “↘” indicates long-lasting problems.

Note 2: Language (1) is basic-level foreign language; Language (2) is advanced-level foreign language.

Second, difficulties are challenging, but international students can manage them in the long run. In spite of the difficulties discussed above, a large number of scholars are optimistic about the result of international students’ adjustment and they hold that the majority of sojourners survive and manage the adjustment (Gu, 2010; Kim, 1988; Sussman, 2002). On the one hand, most international students are capable and promising candidates. As there are substantial number of qualified international students are applying for the overseas university places⁷⁷, only those students who meet

⁷⁶ Source: [http://www.wissenschaft.nrw.de/objekt-](http://www.wissenschaft.nrw.de/objekt-pool/download_dateien/service/Pr_sentation_Dr_Heublein-HI_S_21_01_09.pdf)

[pool/download_dateien/service/Pr_sentation_Dr_Heublein-HI_S_21_01_09.pdf](http://www.wissenschaft.nrw.de/objekt-pool/download_dateien/service/Pr_sentation_Dr_Heublein-HI_S_21_01_09.pdf)

⁷⁷ Take the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) as an example: among the 3,000 international applications, merely 100 are admitted (Source: International Applicants: Helpful Tips. Original Text: “There are many more qualified international students who apply than there are available spaces in the class. Each year, more than 3,000 international students apply, and approximately 100 are admitted.” Retrieved March 5, 2011 from

http://www.mitadmissions.org/topics/apply/international_applicants_helpful_tips/index.shtml

the restrict admission requirement will be admitted⁷⁸. On the other hand, given time, most international students manage the academic difficulties. In terms of grades, Kingston and Forland (2008) reported that from 2003 to 2005, 51% of international students and 53.8% of domestic students graduated with either a first or 2:1 in their degrees at a London University. Another empirical research indicated first-year international students scored higher than their American counterparts in terms of academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, and technology use (Zhao, Kuh, & Carini, 2005). Church (1982) estimated that approximately 80% of international students make reasonable adjustments to their new cultural and institutional demands. The temporary unsatisfying academic performance, especially at the first semester, doesn't tell the potential of their academic competence.

3.1.4 Psychological situation

Facing the academic-related difficulty in the new learning environment, international students encounter stress and anxiety. Chen (1999) regarded foreign language anxiety, educational stressor, and sociocultural stressor as three common stressors to international students. Brown and Holloway (2008) similarly interpreted stress that international students encounter results from cultural distance, language problems, academic demands, loneliness and homesickness, while Pitts (2009) further pointed out that the gap between international students' expectations and the reality of the sojourn was one contributor to adjustment stress. Based on this, psychological situation of international students will be discussed from the perspective of stress, which is discussed from the view point of academic, and cultural and acculturative stress.

Academic stress

Taking the international students' student identity into consideration, academic difficulty becomes the main stress experienced by international students (Wan, Chapman, & Biggs, 1992). For example, Buddington (2002) found that stress and grade point average is significant inversely correlated. Brown (2008a, 2008b) similarly found that academic task caused by academic cultural differences and by language ability is closely related to stress.

What international students often encounter at the beginning of their study abroad is "information overload and lack of familiarity with the educational institution" (Westwood & Barker, 1990, p.253). Ehlers and Hemmingsen (2011) reported that some international students encounter academic difficulty in various forms when they transfer from their host country to the academic culture in Denmark. Gu, Schweisfurth, and Day (2010) also reported that over one-third international students regard the exposure to the

⁷⁸ Some departments or faculty require international graduate candidate with the basic discipline-knowledge.

new pedagogies (e.g., answering questions at class or speaking up in class discussions) in the host country as a big challenge.

Some scholars called such symptom as *academic shock* (Ehlers & Hemmingsen, 2011), *learning shock* (Griffiths, Winstanley, & Gabriel, 2005; Gu, 2011, p.221) or *academic culture shock* (Li, Chen, & Duanmu, 2010, p.394). *Academic shock* or *learning shock* is interpreted as “some unpleasant feelings and difficult experiences” (Gu, 2011, p.221) or “experiences of acute frustration, confusion and anxiety” (Griffiths, Winstanley, & Gabriel, 2005, p.275) that learners encounter when they are exposed to a new learning environment. Although the term *cultural shock* (Oberg, 1960) has been frequently referred as initial experience of adjustment to new cultural environment, not much research on international students view difficulty that they encounter on campus as learning shock, and Griffiths, Winstanley, and Gabriel (2005) mentioned that “the absence of a substantial literature on learning shock is surprising” (p.276).

Academic shock results from different expectation and learning tradition in the students’ home country and in the host country, while international students did not expect such difference. For instance, it is difficult for international students to understand the highly decentralized and autonomous nature of American education (Yan & Berliner, 2009) or they have “mismatched cross-cultural educational expectations” (Zhou, Topping & Jindal-Snape, 2011, p.234). In terms of dealing with such academic shock, Griffiths, Winstanley, and Gabriel (2005) identified three coping strategies adopted by international students: talking to others; diversion or self-care; and doing planning, rationalizing and thinking things through.

Cultural and acculturative stress

Cultural stress. International students, on the one hand reported at least some degree of cultural stress especially for items relating to family and a familiar way of life (Thomson, Rosenthal, & Russell, 2006) or significantly higher degrees of clinical depression and loneliness than did local students in the host country (Oei & Notowidjojo, 1990). On the other hand, international students perceive more acculturative stress than those students in the home country (Pan et al., 2008). Given this, international students’ stress should be obtained more attention, as stress will jeopardize the psychological health.

Acculturative stress. Berry et al. (1987) define the concept of *acculturative stress* as “one kind of stress, that in which the stressors are identified as having their source in the process of acculturation; in addition, there is often a particular set of stress behaviors which occurs during acculturation” (p.492). Poyrazli et al. (2004) found that social support and English proficiency mainly contribute to the variance in students’ acculturative stress. Pan et al. (2008) put forwarded that language-related issues, academic issues, psychosociocultural issues, financial issues and political concerns are five major domains of acculturative stressors for Chinese overseas students. English fluency, social support satisfaction, and social connectedness are predictors of

acculturative stress (Yeh & Inose, 2003). Similarly, Poyrazli et al. (2004) held that international students who primarily contacted with non-natives experienced more acculturative stress. Furthermore, Wei, et al., (2007) found that acculturative stress had a significant effect on depression; and a significant three-way interaction (acculturative stress, maladaptive perfectionism, and length of time in the host country) interacted to predict depression. Zheng and Berry (1991) reported that although acculturative stress reached a peak three to four months after arrival, it declines slowly to the baseline.

3.1.5 Intercultural communication

Current research on the intercultural communication between international and domestic students mainly focuses on quality and quantity of contact, friendship patterns, social support networks, and the functional roles of intercultural interactions (Ward, 2001).

Current situation: quantity and quality

Kim (1988) emphasized two important attributes of sojourners' networks in the host country: the size and proportion of host ties and the strength of host ties (see Figure 3-1 and 3-2). First, the size and proportion of host ties increases over time (Kim, 1988). Given time, sojourners gradually increased the communication with people in the host country, which replaced some of the ethnic ties. One empirical research proved this proposition and found that senior international students participated in diversity-related activities more frequently than their junior counterparts (Zhao, Kuh, and Carini, 2005). Second, quality really counts. Kim (1988) criticized the “normal practice” on host and ethnic relational simply asking sojourners' number of ethnic and non-ethnic friends in their interpersonal networks; she emphasized the “the strength of host ties” (p.110). Brein and David (1971) shared Kim's opinion and believed that occurrence of the contact or interaction is not the most important; instead, they proposed that research should pay more attention to what actually happens during the contact. Third, it is important to underline the substantial role of the length of time playing in sojourners' network.

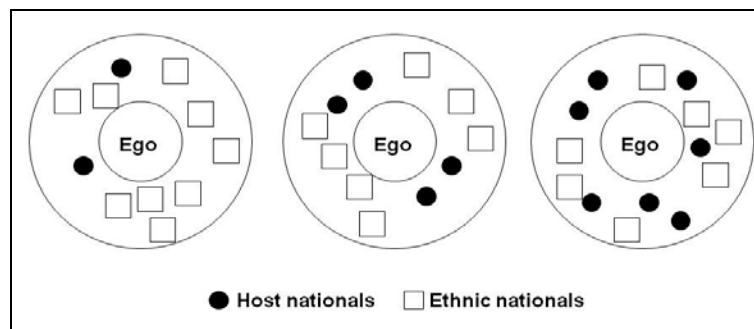


Figure 3-1: Adaptive change in the composition of a relational network
Source: Kim, 1988, p.109

Quantity: limited intercultural communication with local students. Research indicated that international students have few friends in the host country. A national-wide research in the UK (UKCOSA, 2004) found 59% of international students keep close contact either with co-nationals or other international students; and 43% complained that it was hard to get to know UK students.⁷⁹ Japanese students studying in the UK reported their frustration of communicating with the British peers, as they both lack “more interesting” ideas to share with each other (Ayano, 2006). Chinese students studying in the US also reported that they didn’t have common topics or interest with their native peers (Feng, 1991; Lin, 2002). For example, American students talk about sports (football, basketball, etc.), while Chinese students know little about it. Research on mainland Chinese students studying in Hong Kong⁸⁰ similarly indicates that both mainland Chinese students and Hong Kong students reported that they had little communication with each other, due to few common topics to share.⁸¹

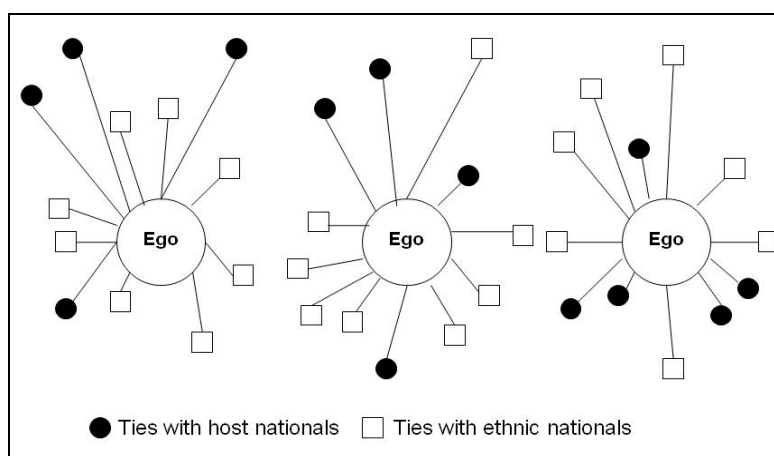


Figure 3-2: Adaptive change in the intimacy of host and ethnic relational ties
Source: Kim, 1988, p.112

In addition, a mixture of friend-circles abroad. In addition, about one-third international students counted their friends as a mixture of UK and international students; while only 7% were friends mainly with UK students rather than international students.

Hi-bye friends. Sovic (2009) described the intercultural communication between international and domestic students as: Hi-bye friends. The term “hi-bye friends”, which an international student described the friendship with the British home students, partly indicates the relationship between international and home students. In terms of quantity, the amount of intercultural communication is typically low (Ward, 2001). In

⁷⁹ Although 60% of international students participating in this survey agreed that UK students were friendly.

⁸⁰ Hong Kong was a colony of the British Empire for about 100 years and its sovereignty was transferred from United Kingdom to the People's Republic of China in 1997.

⁸¹ Both groups insisted the “social and cultural diversity” (such as family and cultural background and values), and “different perceptions of identity” which interfere their communication (Lam, 2006). Hong Kong presents a mixture of traditional Chinese “primary identities (cultural identity, ethnic identity, gender identity and personal identity)” (Lam, 2006, p.100) and modern western cultural traits (Chan & Drover, 1997, p.50).

Germany, one survey conducted at four German universities⁸² indicated that about four-fifth international students complained the insufficient/ poor contact with their German counterparts and lecturers at the university; about one-third international students identify the poor contact with lecturers and domestic students at German universities as a “big” or “very big” challenge to them (Heublein, Sommer, & Weitz, 2004). One study conducted at Technical University of Berlin⁸³ indicated that over one-third (34.05%) international students regard the communication with German students as “poor” (19.15%) or “very poor” (7.45%) or even “no contact at all” (7.45%); nevertheless, in contrast, more than half of them regard the communication with co-national (56.18%) students or with students from other nationalities (57.14%) as either “good” or “very good” (Peroz, 2008).

Reasons for reduced intercultural communication

Foreign language proficiency and motivation. Good language skills diminished the distance between international students and their host counterparts (Brown, 2009). In some non-English speaking countries, the foreign language capacity of the domestic students is also decisive in promoting the intercultural communication (Heublein, Özkilic, & Sommer, 2007).⁸⁴ In addition, the motivation to be engaged with the host country community also matters. As the motivation to study abroad may be primarily instrumental rather than integrative⁸⁵ (Grimshaw, 2011), international students have little motivation to have more interaction with domestic students. Furthermore, students in the host country also lack motivation. Survey indicated that students in the host countries have not realized the benefits of intercultural contact with international students, and demonstrate little motivation in interacting with them (Brown, 2009; UNITE, 2006 found UK).

Protecting-mechanism. Another important reason is international students having uncertainty in contacting the students in the host country. Gudykunst (2004) proposed *Anxiety and Uncertainty Management* (AUM) theory, which interpreted uncertainty and anxiety in effective interpersonal and intergroup communication. Gudykunst suggested that when communicating with strangers, individuals encounter a high level of both uncertainty and anxiety⁸⁶. Another theory that explains the problem is the protecting-

⁸² The four universities which participated in the survey are: RWTH Aachen University, Bielefeld University, Hamburg University of Applied Sciences, and Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich.

⁸³ Centre for International and Intercultural Communication (*Zentrum für internationale und interkulturelle Kommunikation, ZiiK*) conducted the study at the School IV - Electrical Engineering and Computer Science at the Technical University Berlin (*Technische Universität Berlin, TUB*).

⁸⁴ For instance, German universities offer a large number of English-speaking international master programs. Most international students speak only English; therefore, the English proficiency of German students is also essential in the communication.

⁸⁵ Grimshaw (2011) indicated that some motivation of international students was instrumental-oriented. Unlike those who have an integrative aim (who are longing for gaining experience of a foreign culture or learning foreign language), those instrumental-oriented students aim at obtaining an overseas academic degree or to improve their job prospects, and they have little interest to have further communication with local students.

⁸⁶ Gudykunst (1985) extends Berger and Galabrese’s uncertainty reduction theory (URT) to intergroup encounters as the first step in developing anxiety/ uncertainty management (AUM) theory.

mechanism/ defensive reactions. Kim (1988) regarded “humans are characteristically homeostatic, attempting to hold constant a variety of variables in our internal meaning structure to achieve an ordered whole. When individuals receive messages that disrupt their internal order, they experience disequilibrium” (p.44). In order to prevent such anxious and uncertain feelings, some international students simply avoid communicating with their counterparts in the host nation.

Culture difference.⁸⁷ International students often reported cultural differences was a primary reason influencing the intercultural communication with their native counterpart from the very start and throughout the process of relationship development (Bochner, Buker, & McLeod, 1976⁸⁸; Chen, 2007). Take the “Pub culture” in the UK for example, international students studying in the UK commented negatively about the prevalence of heavy drinking and the role of alcohol in social activities in the UK and drinking culture in the UK becomes a barrier to integration: those who don’t drink alcohol find it is not easy to get to know peer UK students outside the class (Turner, 2002; UKCOSA, 2004).

International students are afraid of causing jealousy in the co-national circle. Another unusual reason, in some isolated ethnic groups, international students are afraid of causing jealousy in their co-national circle. Klein et al. (1971) interpreted that “withdrawal is enforced by the noticeable lack of tolerance that exists within the subculture” (p.85). Japanese students similarly reported that to make friends with co-national Japanese students and British students “often incompatible” with each other, as having British friends often causes other Japanese students to be jealous, which might leads exclusion from the co-national network (Ayano, 2006). The jealousy actually reveals the paradoxical attitudes among international students: on the one hand, they do admire those who are able to establish good relationship with local students; on the other hand, their insufficient foreign language proficiency and intercultural communication skills prevent them from doing so. To deal with the stress and frustration, members of the co-national community exert pressure on those “traitor”.

In addition, in some cases, international students encounter racism and discrimination. For instance, based on an ethnographic method, a study reported some Muslim students experienced racial and Islamophobic abuse at a UK university, especially after the September 11 terrorist attack (Brown, 2009). Nevertheless, most domestic students don’t hold a negative attitude towards international students.

⁸⁷ Cultural distance not only has an influence on the intercultural communication, but also on the overall adjustment of international students. More details are to be introduced in the *Factors Influencing Adjustment of International Students* (Chapter 3.1.6).

⁸⁸ Bochner, Buker and McLeod (1976) adopted a creative “small-world” survey to trace communication patterns in an international student dormitory found that culture and gender similarity were two major determinants of social interaction among international students.

Friendship patterns: a functional model

Bochner, McLeod and Lin (1977) suggested a functional model for the development of foreign students' friendship patterns from a social psychology perspective. They hold sojourners belong to three social networks: (1) a primary, monoculture (conational) network, (2) a secondary, bi-cultural (foreign student-host national) network, and (3) a third multi-cultural (friendship between non-compatriot foreign student) network.

Co-national network. Bochner (1981) suggested that international students are inclined to have friends from the same culture. First, co-national friends serve as a protective function and provide international students with "psychological security, self-esteem, and a sense of belonging" (Church, 1982, p.551-552). According to Bochner and his colleagues (1977), co-national friends or ethnic group in the host country play the role as "gatekeeper", "patronage" or "culture broker"⁸⁹. Maslow (1943) held that "to seek safety and stability in the world are seen in the very common preference for familiar rather than unfamiliar things, or for the known rather than the unknown" (p.379). Out of the sense of insecurity about their cultural identity abroad, international students are inclined to build friendship with co-national students, seeking and maintaining for their "national and cultural identity" (Bochner, McLeod, & Lin, 1977, p.279). Klein et al. (1971) concluded the co-national friendship provides the international students with: (1) structure in the new world, (2) mutual esteem and approval, (3) suitable marriage partners and substitutes peers for parents in complex ways of courting, (4) relief from stresses of coping with new ways in a strange tongue. Such "material, informational, emotional, educational, and entertainment services" (Kim, 1988, p.64) facilitates sojourners' adaptation in the initial phase.⁹⁰

Second, co-national friends also play the role as reference groups, student sojourner often discuss and complain about the problems that they encounter with co-national friends. For instance, Pitts (2004) found that within their co-national network, international students refined and created new expectations for study abroad. Similar experience make them feel closer to each other and such process reduces expectation gaps enabling sojourners to adjust over time and allowing for the development of a more nuanced cultural identity. In short, contact with co-nationals provides "the reassurance of instrumental and emotional support that was unforthcoming on the part of the host community" (Brown, 2009, p.246).

Bi-cultural and multi-cultural network. Bochner, McLeod and Lin (1977) held that network with local students was based on professional and career-oriented purposes, as the native peers "control the desired academic resources" (p.279). Through contacting locals, sojourner learns "patterns, trend, consistencies and inconsistencies in the host

⁸⁹ Kim introduced the term "gatekeepers", "patronage" and "culture broker" raised by other authors (Kim, 1988, p.120-121).

⁹⁰ For example, an online survey proved Kim's opinion, as Chinese students newly arrived reported that need more support from online ethnic social groups, compared to those who had lived in the US for a longer period of time (Ye, 2006).

environment” (Kim, 1988, p.87-88), which facilitates international students’ academic or professional aspiration. Although some sophisticated co-national students may also provide significant information and share their personal experience in details, host national friends, provide more first-hand “insider” information. Furthermore, it is important to mention, even some international students regard the establishment of relationship with students as “more difficult” and “more demanding” (Pearson-Evans, 2006, p.45), it is important to notice that such initial utilitarian purpose may later turn out to be long-lasting friendship.

In a multi-cultural environment, international students also keep frequent interaction with students from other countries. However, Bochner and his colleagues (1977) indicated “the impetus for the formation of multi-cultural bonds is usually quite weak” (p.280). To some extent, non-compatriot international student is important play an important role as well, as they share the same student identity as student sojourner as well. In addition to the above three networks, Pearson-Evans (2006) later supplements another “monoculture network”, which emphasized that the contact with friends and family at home also played a significant role in adjustment abroad. She regards such “monoculture network” as “a type of extended ethnic network” (p.44).

Benefit of intercultural communication

Much previous research supported the positive relationship between intercultural communication competence and international students’ adjustment in the host country.

First, intercultural communication facilitates international students’ academic adjustment and proves their foreign language proficiency. Brown (2009) held that international students benefited from intercultural communication with domestic students in two major areas: foreign language proficiency and learning the host culture. Friends in the host culture offer international students encouragement, support, and advice (Wan, Chapman, & Biggs, 1992), and play the role as an interpreter of the host culture to the international student, friends in the host country are viewed as “the best source of information about host cultural norms” (Brown, 2009, p.442). Zhou and Todman (2009) held an international student who feels isolated or unable to make friends, is very likely to have difficulty of academic adaptation. Sovic (2009) concluded that international students benefit from efficient intercultural communication in terms of “better academic achievement, a lower drop-out rate, better self-motivation, better usage of campus services, less alienation and homesickness, a better sense of identity, improved fluency in English, greater satisfaction with courses, and greater enjoyment of university and of life generally” (p.748). Brown and Holloway (2008) advocated that international students interacted frequently with native network and practiced foreign language more often, they will reach adjustment more quickly than those who only stay in the co-national group. Some international students who only stay in the co-national

circles, on the contrary, have very few chances to practice the language of the host country.⁹¹

Second, intercultural communication with the host nationals increases degree of satisfactory. Hull (1978) and Klineberg and Hull (1979) held a good social interaction with local counterparts not only helped sojourners form a favorable attitudes towards the host country, but also facilitate their personal adjustment and general sojourn satisfaction. Sewell and Davidson (1961) found a significant correlation between social interaction of Scandinavian students with Americans and their satisfaction with their sojourn. Similarly, international students having local friends were more likely to feel satisfied with their stay in the UK (UKCOSA, 2004, p.66). Pruitt (1978) also indicated that African students who spend their leisure time with American families and white American students held more positive attitude toward American culture. In the meantime, those Chinese students who failed to establish close relationship with local Americans, hold an unfriendly view of Americans and regard the local people as “insincere, superficial, and incapable of making real friendships (Klein et al., 1971).

Third, to keep psychologically healthy. Empirical research found that a good contact with host counterparts facilitates international students’ psychological well-being. Ramsay, Jones, and Barker (2007) found that freshman who felt well adjusted reported higher levels of social companionship support than the less adjusted group. Compared with domestic students, international students are longing for more emotional, practical and informational support. International students who mainly socialize with non-natives are likely to experience more acculturative stress compared with other subgroups (Poyrazli et al., 2004), while those who keep closer contact or have spend more time with native people achieve self-confidence, well-being, satisfaction (Antler, 1970; Klein et al., 1971; Klineberg & Hull, 1979; Wang, 2009), which in turn will generate a more direct impact on their sociocultural adaptation. Klein et al., (1971) revealed that those students having emotional problems are extremely isolated from social contact with both co-nationals and Americans.

So far, the overwhelming majority of research concerning the intercultural communication between international and host students is more encouraged by scholars; while co-national friendship seems to be regarded as a negative influence on adjustment in the long run. However, considering the significant function of important support system that co-national friends play, Pedersen (1980) held that contact with fellow countrypersons in dormitories, clubs and living arrangements should not be discouraged. In the meantime, results indicate that both co-national identification and host national identification promote Chinese students’ positive psychological states or subjective well-being (Zheng, Sang, & Wang, 2004).

⁹¹ For example, in Australia, a survey demonstrated that at least one-third of overseas students who gained permanent residence visas 2005-06 after graduating failed to reach the level normally required for employment as professionals, although they have been living, studying and working in Australia for at least two years (Birrell, 2006, p.57).

3.1.6 Factors influencing adjustment of international students

Some international students are able to deal with the academic and cultural challenge in host country, while others fail to manage the dramatic transformation. It has been long since scholars explore the possible factors that influence the adjustment of international students: much research probe factors influencing adjustment from various perspectives, instead of in a one-dimension manner. Research on student sojourners has been conducted mainly from perspective of psychology (Searle & Ward, 1990; Wang, 2009⁹²; Ward & Kennedy, 1992), sociology, and social psychology⁹³.

In sojourner's perspective, Church (1982) reviewed approximately 300 papers concerning sojourners' adjustment and summarized the variables influencing adjustment into three categories: (1) background variables (nationality, status, language proficiency, age, educational level, and previous cross-cultural experience), (2) situational variables (social interaction, overlapping membership conflict), and (3) personality variables. Kim (1988), based on her communication model of cross-cultural adaptation, further added the host communication competence as an important variable of sojourners' adjustment. The following text will review the background, situation and personal factors influencing on adjustment of international students.

Background factors

The most widely studied background variables are demographic (gender, age, nationality/ cultural background), foreign language proficiency, personality attributes (preparedness for change), educational level, and previous cross-cultural experience (Church, 1982; Kim, 1988). The following text mainly reviews the influence of gender and academic discipline.⁹⁴

Gender. Some studies suggest that female foreign students report a greater number of adjustment problems than do their male counterparts (Church, 1982), as female student sojourners appear to have a different stress-symptom structure (Dyal & Chan, 1985), or greater behavioral and physiological reactions to academic stressors (Misra & Castillo, 2004) than male students. Misra (2004) further explained that this might result from the gender-role in the society, that woman are expected to express their emotion. Nevertheless, some empirical research indicated the opposite results, as female

⁹² Wang (2009) found personality variables (extraversion, openness to new experience, locus of control), social and interpersonal variables (social support, the quality of contact with host nationals); communication variables (language competence and confidence, communication styles); and other personal variables (coping strategies, acculturation strategies) influence the adjustment of international students

⁹³ Sussmann (2000) summarized variables that influence cross-cultural adjustment into two categories: (a) antecedent and (b) consequent variables namely. The former (antecedent variables) have an effect on the adjustment process (e.g. personality, behavioral skills, previous overseas experience, cultural distance, cultural knowledge, etc.), while the latter (consequent variables) result from cultural transitions, contain both positive (e.g. growth) and negative ones (personal shock, loss of personal intimacy, etc.).

⁹⁴ Since some background factors will be introduced in the following part as well, here, the background factors first cover gender and academic discipline.

international students seem to have an easier time in adjusting to the host country. For instance, Zheng, Sang, and Wang (2003) found that females were happier and more psychologically adjusted than males among Chinese students in Australia, and Guan (2007) indicated that male Chinese students have difficulty in transferring to the German system. In addition to the above opinions, other scholars held that gender itself did not qualify as a theoretically sound explanatory factor for the observed differences in adaptation (Kim, 1988).

Academic discipline. Major or academic discipline plays an important role in the academic culture. Becher (1989) proposed that different disciplines have different academic cultures, maintaining that there are identifiable patterns within the relationship between the ‘knowledge focus’ and ‘knowledge communities’ of each discipline. Feng (1991) suggested students majored in science adjusted better than social sciences students in general, as science-majors are not expected to have high competence in language skills as do social science.

Situational factors

In addition to the background factors, Klein et al., (1971) pointed out that situational variables exert important influence on the student’s adaptation and behavior. Here, the situational influence of intercultural communication, cultural distance and geographic proximity, and support from the host environment will be discussed.

Intercultural communication. Empirical research indicates that intercultural communication facilitates the international students’ adjustment, as researcher found that those well-adjusted international students significantly benefit from the higher levels of social companionship support (Ramsay, Jones & Barker, 2007). Furnham, Bochner, and Lonner (1986) regarded social contact with local people as one of most important factors influencing coping process of students at a foreign university, thus frequent interaction with locals facilitates international students’ adjustment in the host country (Furnham, 1997; Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002). Kim (1988) held that successful adaptation of sojourners was related to their ability to communicate in a given cultural environment. In addition, intercultural communication is proved to be correlated with international students’ academic success and lowered the probability of dropping out (Westwood & Barker, 1990).

Cultural distance and geographic proximity. Another situational factor which attracts much attention is the culture difference between the home and host country. Although the construct “cultural distance” is often applied in the field of international business (Shenkar, 2001), current research on sojourner (international students) regards it as an important factor as well. Kim (1988) believed the greater the disparity between two cultures, the larger the cultural gap to be bridged, and Furnham and Bochner (1982) reached a similar conclusion that cultural distance and social difficulty were strongly related. Sussman (2002) proposed that cultural distance between home and host country had an influence on adjustment, particularly the cultural values that sojourner held.

Similar results have been reported by Redmond (2000). In terms of the cultural values, Redmond found that intercultural competencies differentiating between international students from cultures closest to the host country and those who come far away and further suggested that cultural distance played a role as a mediating factor between stress and intercultural communication competence. A three-by-three-nation⁹⁵ empirical study suggested that geographic proximity (e.g. rank of specific country in the international system) and rate of social mobility (see Table 3-6) had an influence on international students' adjustments and degrees of acceptance of the foreign culture (Galtung, 1965).

Table 3-6: Probability of acculturation

		Rank of cultures in geographic proximity	
		Differential rank	Equal rank
Rate of social mobility	Low	(1) almost no acculturation	(2) little acculturation
	High	(3) much acculturation	(4) some acculturation

Source: Galtung, 1965, p.267

Sewell and Davidsen's (1961) finding echoed Galtung's assumption, and reported that Scandinavian students having little difficulty in adjusting to life in the United States, while cultural variability challenges Asian students studying in Australia (Barker et al., 1991). Furukawa (1997) found that cultural distance had a strong influence on the psychological adjustment of international exchange student: the greater the difference between the host country and the home country of international students⁹⁶, the greater they demonstrated psychological distress. In spite of the above discussion on cultural difference, Kingston and Forland (2008) pointed that "Cultural differences may be considered problematic if evaluated from the perspective of another cultural background" (p.211). One finding in New Zealand supports the cultural distance hypothesis, as Asian international students reported significantly more difficulty than did their European counterparts (Ward, 2004).

Support from the host environment. Leung (2001) found supportive social relationships were important for overseas students' psychological and academic adaptation; nevertheless, being away from family and friends in the new cultural and academic environment, international students receive less social support than domestic students (Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002). When they meet difficulty in the new academic milieu, support will help them to deal with the challenge. Klein et al., (1971) found that international students obtaining strong basic adaptive capacities were capable in dealing with situational stresses. Academic support plays a particularly important role in facilitating international students' adjustment. Wilcox et al. (2005) differentiated the type of support from friends and tutors on their course from those provided by the

⁹⁵ The research undertook interviews with international students from the UAR, India, and Iran, who had returned to their home countries after two years or more of study abroad in the German Federal Republic, the U.K., and the US

⁹⁶ The respondents of this research were 272 Japanese students (high-school and college students), who attended a one-year international exchange program and stayed in countries in Asia, Europe, Latin America, North America (the US) and Oceania (Australia).

friends, and they regarded the former was more instrumental, informational and appraisive oriented. Similarly, a longitudinal study based on eight semesters undertaken by Boyer and Sedlacek (1987) indicated that availability of a support person, as well as self-confidence, was important determinant of adjustment to academic demands and attainment of academic success. Furthermore, Kim (1988) put forward two host environmental conditions: receptivity and conformity. The former adopts an acceptance attitude, while the latter demands the newcomers follow and observe the host cultural and communication norms. Some universities still hold a conformity attitude, as their lecturers are not yet ready for the cultural-difference and are not able to provide much help to international students; universities, in the meantime, have made little effort to provide advisory service (Danckwortt, 1984). In Germany, merely 26% international students reported they received help and service from German lecturers (Breitenbach & Danckwortt, 1961).

Duration of stay. Wang (2009) suggested that length of residence is an important factor concerning Chinese students' cross-cultural adjustment. Zheng, Sang, and Wang (2003) suggested that acculturation process may result in acculturative stress initially; adaptation might reduce Chinese students' acculturative stress with length of residence in the host country.

Personal factors

Researchers emphasized the importance of an open attitude to the adjustment. Kim (1988) proposed that those who held an open attitude to the host culture are likely to deal with the uncertainties and challenges in the host country. Church (1982) concluded that more positive sojourner adjustment has been "related to less authoritarianism, increased personal flexibility, increased modernism, sociability and assertiveness, and more realistic sojourn goals and expectations, and the perceptual sharpener versus perceptual" (p.557). Ward, Leong and Low (2004) suggested psychological adaptation was associated with extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and (less) neuroticism, while sociocultural adaptation is linked to greater extraversion and less neuroticism. Klein et al., (1971) also regarded self-confidence and the self-esteem as significant predictors of adaptation.

3.2 Methodology and research design of the previous literature

There is a trend of using "classic model" on sojourner adjustment. Standard scales of psychological and sociocultural adjustments are frequently employed in the current research on international students. Take the research on Chinese students as an example, much research has been conducted based on psychological and sociocultural adjustment model developed by Collen Ward and her associates (Searle & Ward, 1990; Ward & Kennedy, 1999; Ward & Rana-Deuba, 1999) to explore the adjustment of Chinese students in the US (Wang, 2009; Ye, 2006), the UK (Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006),

and Australia (Zheng, Sang, & Wang, 2004). In addition, many researchers developed inventories or checklist and undertook qualitative and/or quantitative studies on international students' adjustment, based on the principles of the classic models (Feng, 2009), or they are inclined to combine various psychological scales to test their model (Tsang, 2001).

In spite of the contribution of research on adjustment by using the inventories or scales, we might question: whether such inventories or scales really tell us what the sojourner adjustment is? Whether such quantitative methods depict the process of adjustment? For instance, Church (1982) did not support using simple survey tools (survey questionnaires and problem checklists, etc.) to measure the adjustment, as he regarded such studies failed to relate sojourn behavior and adjustment difficulties. He further suggested scholars exert more effort in conducting research through using more diverse methods in view of the dynamic feature of sojourner adjustment.

One remarkable new trend of research on international student is: a number of researchers adopted an ethnographic approach (grounded theory) to explore the international students' adjustment, in order to evaluate the process and outcome of their adjustment (Feng, 2009).⁹⁷ Much research adopted naturalistic methods, such as observation, in-depth interviews, or informal meetings in the ethnographic research (Brown, 2008b; Brown & Holloway, 2008; Holmes, 2004; Jackson, 2006; Lam, 2006; Liu, 2002; Pitts, 2009; Zhao, 2007; Zhao & Bourne, 2011) to understand international students' learning experience and intercultural communication. Furthermore, some scholars have not been limited to the formal interview or observations, but adopt other creative research approaches. For example, Pearson (2006) analyzed the diaries of Irish students studying in Japan. Ayano (2006) combined the interviews with collecting imagery and metaphors in Japanese students' narratives in Britain. Burnett and Gardner (2006) adopted an optional method by asking Chinese students fulfill to describe their experience in the UK by spontaneously drawing in diagrams with different colors. Such visual material provides overseas students a different method (non-verbal) to depict their experience abroad. Jackson (2006) collected participant observation, reflective diary entries, critical incident reports, informal ethnographic discussions, photographs/videotapes to explore the Hong Kong Chinese students in England.

The third significant trend of current research on international students is: the number of studies adopting a longitudinal approach is increasing. More scholars realized that adjustment is a process, instead of a result of a scale or checklist. Currently, the time span of the longitudinal research on international students ranges from 21 weeks (Cemalcilar & Falbo, 2008) to 8 semesters (Boyer & Sedlacek, 1987). One longitudinal

⁹⁷ One attribute of the ethnographic that worth noting is the researcher him or herself is a lecturer or supervisor of a certain exchange program (Brown, 2009; Brown & Holloway, 2008), who has accordingly privilege and advantage to have direct access to international students (e.g., in-depth interviewing or casual conversation) and substantial chances of observing students. Furthermore, it is important to notice that, an ethnographic research is often conducted in a longitudinal approach (e.g., Wang, 2010; Zhao, 2007).

research even managed to interview students after 10 years, exploring one-year overseas' influence on their career, international identity, and intercultural competency (Alred & Byram, 2006).⁹⁸ Most longitudinal research divides the length of stay into three ⁹⁹ (Cemalcilar & Falbo, 2008; Gong & Chang, 2007; Hechanova-Alampay, et al., 2002; Wang, 2010; Ward, et al., 1998; Ward & Kennedy, 1999; Zhao, 2007; Zhou & Todman, 2009) or four periods (Jou & Fukada, 1996; Skyrme, 2005; Zhang & Xu, 2007). Some research extended the initial status even before arrival (Cemalcilar & Falbo, 2008; Zhou & Todman, 2009; Jou & Fukada, 1996), shortly after arrival such as 24 hours (Ward, et al., 1998) or first week (Gong & Chang, 2007). This dynamic research depicts the change of international students in different periods of their adjustment: such as pattern of strain (Hechanova-Alampay, et al., 2002), the psychological well-being, identification with the host culture, and stable identification with home cultures (Cemalcilar & Falbo, 2008). Moreover, Zhou and Todman (2009) suggested two main strands of longitudinal investigation of student sojourners: predictive studies and monitoring studies. Studies using the former strand focus on how pre-departure variables predict successful post-arrival adaptation, while the latter seek to find out the patterns of sojourner adjustment over time.¹⁰⁰

Regarding the fact that undertaking a longitudinal approach is time-consuming, most longitudinal research achieves data based on scales or inventories, with few exceptions using interviews (Skyrme, 2005; Wang, 2010; Zhang & Xu, 2007) or participant observation (Zhao, 2007). Furthermore, it is worth noting that the result of the longitudinal does not identical with each other. Some international students either encounter the greatest adjustment problems at the entry point (Ward, et al., 1998) or their stress was at its height in the initial stage (Brown & Holloway, 2008); while other research found the pattern of strain peaks three months after the start of the semester (Hechanova-Alampay, et al., 2002).

3.3 Research on international students in Germany

A large amount of research on international students has been conducted in Germany. However, it is important to point out, since the majority research is only available in

⁹⁸ Based on a longitudinal study, Alred & Byram (2006) reported a long-term educational influence of overseas residence on foreign students abroad. They interviewed a group of British university students (who once spent worked as teaching assistant in France for one year) before and after their sojourn and 10 years later, and the result indicated how this one-year overseas experience in France become part of their everyday professional lives, as well as the great in overseas intercultural competence and sense of an international identity and the importance they have achieved abroad.

⁹⁹ Three stages include the test at the beginning, in the middle or at end of the semester.

¹⁰⁰ According to the author's best knowledge, so far, there is no single study covering the whole adjustment period of international students (either from pre-departure / new arrival in the host country to the return to the home country), longitudinal research enables the researchers better understand and depict the transition process of international students over the time, by describing the states of as possible.

German language, compared with the relative research in English-speaking countries, the current research status of international students in Germany is not well known in international-based periodicals: this brings some difficulty in terms of further international comparison.

One unique feature that differentiates research on international students in Germany and in other countries is: research on international students in Germany is not based on customer-oriented background, as Germany charges international students none or relative low tuition fee. Since host countries rely on the fees, international students are often regarded as “customers” or “part of the commercial aspect of universities” (Montgomery, 2010, p.6). In such market-driven context, host countries have been paying special attention to wants and need of international student, which “overshadows discussion of their personal, social, and individual purposes in pursuing study at university” (Montgomery, 2010, p.6).

If we take a close look at the current literature on international students in Germany, we might immediately get the impression: *diversity*. The topics of the current research cover most important themes closely related to the international students; in addition, the target student group covers international students of different country origins. Furthermore, various research methods have been adopted.

3.3.1 Range of investigation

So far, a large amount of research on international students has been conducted in national-wide, federal state-wide, city-wide, university-wide and faculty-wide (see Table 3-7).

Research based on a national-wide survey aims at depicting international students’ general situation of study and life in Germany, such as structural characteristics of studies (type of time commitments, student identity), personal characteristics, previous education and motivation for studying in Germany, living situation in Germany, and Germany as a place to study (Isserstedt & Link, 2008; Isserstedt & Kandulla, 2010). Such survey has several attributes: first, the result of such survey covers a wide range of topics closely related to the international students studying in Germany; second, the results are representative, as the sample corresponds to a large degree with the distribution according to official statistical data (Isserstedt & Link, 2008); third, the survey is re-conducted in a certain time interval (e.g. every 2-3 years). In addition to the national-wide survey, University of Oldenburg conducted a survey on social and integration situation of international students in 1982, 1993 and 2001 (Feldhaus & Logemann, 2002) and the faculty of Electrical Engineering and Computer Sciences of Technical University Berlin repeated a similar research in 1992 and 2008 (Peroz, 2008).

Table 3-7: Research on international students in different level/ range

Range	Title	Method
National- wide	▪ Internationalization of Higher Education (Isserstedt & Kandulla, 2010; Isserstedt & Link, 2008)	Questionnaire
Federal	▪ Thuringia ¹⁰¹	Questionnaire(260)+
state/city –wide	(Kruse & Santina, 1999)	Interviews (60)
	▪ Baden-Württemberg (Jabeen Khan, 1988)	Questionnaire(60)+
		Interviews (70)
	▪ The social and economic situation of Chinese students in Berlin (Mao, 2010)	Questionnaire (154)
University-wide	▪ University of Bremen (Guan, 2007),	Questionnaire
	▪ University of Trier (Krüger, 2001; Glembek, 2001),	Questionnaire
	▪ University of Frankfurt (Kotenkar, 1980)	Questionnaire
	▪ University of Oldenburg (Feldhaus & Logemann, 2002)	Questionnaire
	▪ University of LMU Munich (Postner, 2007)	Interview
Faculty-wide	▪ Electrical Engineering and Computer Science at Technical University of Berlin (Peroz, 2008)	Questionnaire

Note: The above table is compiled by the author.

3.3.2 Research focus of international student groups varies

In Germany, target group of international students switches according to the policy of receiving international students. Hosseinizadeh (2005) divided the research on international students in Germany after Second World War into three phases: education aid, EU-orientation, and international competition. First phase: educational aid (after WW II - middle of 1980s). Students from developing countries were provided with opportunities of studying in Germany as an educational aid in the development policy of the federal government. For example, a large number of international students from Asia and Africa received German scholarship and studied in Germany. Against this background, research on international students in 1950s and 1960s focuses on students from Asia and/or Africa¹⁰² (Aich, 1962; Breitenbach & Danckwortt, 1961). Second phase: EU-orientation (middle of 1980s-1990s), the aspect of the Europeanization of education becomes the most important component of research on international students, as programs such as ERASMUS encourage student mobility within the European Union. Third phase: against the background of internationalization, Germany found it was not as competitive as other countries in attracting the promising international students; in order to change the situation, Germany exerted itself to increase its international appeal. Since the number of Chinese students is relative small, not much research has referred this foreign student group. For instance, the latest version of *Wissenschaft Weltoffen 2012* focuses Chinese Students at German Universities.

¹⁰¹ Thuringia (in German: Thüringen) is one state locating in the central of Germany.

¹⁰² Danckwortt (1984) reviewed over 50 important works concerning international students.

Table 3-8: Target group of empirical research on international students in Germany

Target international student group	Sub-target group
Africa and Asia	Student from Africa and Asia as scholarship receiver (Breitenbach & Danckwortt, 1961) Farbige unter Weißen (Aich, 1963)
Far Eastern countries	Ausländische Studierende in der BRD: Anpassung fernöstlicher Studierender an das Leben in Deutschland (Chen, 1995)
Eastern Asia	International students' satisfaction at German universities: East Asian students as an example (Japanese, Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese, etc.) (Ro, 2006)
Chinese	Adjustment and integration of Chinese students in Germany (Guan, 2007) Chinese students studying in Germany (Zhou, 2010) Adjustment of Chinese students in Germany (Guan, 2010)

Note: the above table is compiled by author.

3.3.3 Research methods

First, current empirical research on international students in Germany adopts both quantitative (scale and questionnaires) and qualitative (interviews) methods (see Table 3-7). Second, diverse research designs have also been involved, which makes an enlightening comparison of both within-group (between different international student groups) and cross group (between German students and international students) possible. Third, comparison between international students and German students: much research on international students conducted in Germany has included the comparative/control-group in the research. Survey indicates international students have a worse study and life conditions: international students obtain less financial income, live in a smaller living space, and encounter more problems in seeking jobs than their German counterparts (Krüger, 2001). Third, comparisons have been made between different international students groups: empirical compared various international students in Germany. Jabeen Khan (1988) compared the psychological situation of international students coming from South Asia (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal Pakistan and Sri Lanka) and South Europe (Greece and Italy).

3.3.4 Themes of international students in Germany

As one of the biggest host countries of international students, Germany has exerted itself to better understand the learning and living experience of international students and conducted substantial number of empirical research. As early as in 1984, Danckwortt reviewed previous research on international students in Germany, and summarized the research into six categories: (1) Interest and support for studying abroad, (2) Application, selection and preparation prior to departure, (3) Problems of the full

studies abroad¹⁰³, (4) Social and cultural issues, (5) Problems after studying abroad, and (6) International comparisons (see table 3-9).

Inspired by the above general overview, the following text reviews the research on international students exploring learning experience at university, intercultural communication with German lecturers and students, psychological situation, and social integration.

¹⁰³ Latest national survey indicates the biggest challenges and difficulties mentioned by international students are: orientation of study in the German educational system, funding the study and contact with German students and lecturers, finding accommodation, applying for visa, the residence permit, or employment permit, understanding German language, recognition of the previous academic performance, academic performance, and admission (Isserstedt & Kandulla, 2010).

Table 3-9: Research on international students in Germany

<p>I. Interest and support for study abroad</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Government funding policies and the reasons 2. Private funding policy and its forms 3. Public interest in the exchange 4. Interest of students on exchange 5. Motives for the decision <p>II. Application, selection and preparation prior to departure</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Application Process 7. Competitions, entrance exams 8. Approval procedures 9. Preparation before leaving the home country 10. Preparation in the host country 11. Prior information about the host country and its university system (teaching and learning systems) <p>III. Problems of the full studies abroad</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 12. Study program, form, content 13. Study duration 14. Further foreign language training 15. Internships, work experience 16. Student Advisory 17. Dropout 18. Academic success, trials 19. Acceptance of testing in the home 20. Performance review at work <p>IV Social and cultural issues</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 21. Organizations of mentoring 22. Consultants and support staff 23. Reception and orientation program 24. Cultural programs and support contact 25. Social Security 26. Financial security 27. Accommodation 28. Relation to police administration, including strangers 29. Social contacts 30. Discrimination experiences 31. Difficulty of adjustment 32. Diseases <p>V. Problems after studying abroad</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 33. Remain in the host country (brain drain) 34. Re-adjustment problems in general 35. Job search assistance, and thereby 36. Professional success, career 37. Einstellungsänderungen by Auslandsaufenthalt 38. Change of behavior through staying abroad 39. Long-term effects (duration of changes) 40. Reaction of the environment (family, work colleagues) 41. Unification of returnee <p>VI. International comparisons</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 42. Supply and demand for foreign education 43. Distribution on both the sending and receiving countries 44. Historical comparisons, future predictions 45. Literature on the topic, research and its impact

Source: Danckwott, 1984, p.18-19

Learning experience at university

First, in terms of the language: over four-fifths of international students¹⁰⁴ who purchase the first degree in Germany complain they encounter language problems and 1/4 indicated that this problem is “serious or very serious” (Heublein, Sommer, & Weitz, 2004). Second, as far as academic challenge is concerned: a large amount of international students reported they encountered substantial adjustment problems at German academic system and felt lack of help (Breitenbach & Danckwortt, 1961). Heublein, Sommer, and Weitz (2004) reported the large percent of dropout among international students. At undergraduate’s level at German universities, students are required to learn in an independent way, while this is a challenge to students coming from a strict teacher-oriented learning environment. To get adjusted and fit to the new learning environment is a big challenge to the newcomers. In addition, the lack of supervision and care of foreign and inadequate orientation program compose a great threat to the academic success.

Intercultural communication with German lecturers and students

First, concerning contact with German peers, merely one-third international students regarded the contact with German students as “very good” or “good” (38.3%); while one-fourth of them regarded it as “bad” or “very bad” (26.6%) and about 7.4% of them had no contact with German students at all (Peroz, 2008). Second, in terms of the contact with the academic staff, 72.3% and 40.9% of international students regarded the contact with their *Fachmentoren*¹⁰⁵ and *Tutor* as “good” or “very good” respectively; they also regarded the visit in their *Fachmentor* or Tutor’s office hour as more helpful than that of professor’s or research staff’s; while less than one-third of them report they had “good” or “very good” contact with professors or research staff respectively, and only very few of them go to professors’ or research staff’ office hour (Peroz, 2008)¹⁰⁶. It is worth noting that, unlike other research which viewing the interaction from international students’ perspective exclusively, research in Germany explored the intercultural communication from German students’ and lecturers’ perspective as well. For example, one research indicated that 42% of the German students reported that they had little contact or no contact with foreign students, and merely one-fifth of the German students frequently communicate with the international students (Heublein, Özkilic, & Sommer, 2007), as the majority of German students reported that they had only fewer chances (87%) to meet foreign students¹⁰⁷.

¹⁰⁴ Here “international students” refers to the Bildungsausländer only.

¹⁰⁵ Fachmentoren: mentor in a particular subject or field.

¹⁰⁶ The percentage international students go the office hour of academic staff: tutor’s office hour – 80.5%, Fachmentor’s office hour – 67.8%, research staff’s office hour - 30%, and professor’s office hour – 17%.

¹⁰⁷ German students reported that two things were the main barriers of the communication with the international students: (1) 87% of them had not yet met the international students; and (2) 83% of them had no chance to talk to the international students yet (Heublein, Özkilic, & Sommer, 2007, p.31).

Psychological situation

So far, the research on international students' psychological situation indicates much difficulty in Germany. For instance, Jabeen Khan (1988) explored the critical life situation of international students from a psychological perspective and found that about 65% international suffered from "sadness" and 51% felt "lonely".

Motivation. Motivation of international students studying in Germany varies. Feldhaus and Logemann (2002) compared answers provided by Asian, European, African and American students and found that the origins of international students played a role in the motivation. For example, the favorable academic conditions¹⁰⁸ attracted Asian students most; while job-related reasons had the biggest influence on African students; while one study indicates that international students from some countries were motivated to study in Germany, where the chances of being admitted to the university is much bigger (Aich, 1963). Furthermore, it is worth noticing that in Germany, even in those states which charge tuition fee, there are no differentiated fees or public subsidies for international students, and they pay the same amount of fee as the domestic students do; while the US, the UK, Australia, and other countries charge international students much higher tuition than home students.

Adjustment. The current research (e.g. Chen, 1995; Guan, 2007, Guan, 2010) explores the overall experience and living experience (e.g. learning and living situation, language, psychological problem, social contact, and social situation) in Germany under the umbrella concept "adjustment" (in German: *Anpassung*). In addition, similar to the trend of general research on international students in other countries, the concept "adjustment" is often judged by using psychological scale or questionnaire (Guan, 2007; Jabeen Khan, 1998¹⁰⁹). Chen (1995) explored the adjustment problem of Eastern Asian students: Eastern Asian students often tried to overcome discouragement through reading, meeting friends, and getting involved in a hobby. Guan (2007) and Guan (2010) investigated Chinese students' adjustment in University of Bremen and Göttingen respectively. The former research indicated that the self-concept play an important role in the adjustment; while the latter found, facing difficulty, Chinese students use different resources as their German counterparts to deal with the problem.

Satisfaction. Compared with the research on adjustment, number of studies on satisfaction is relative low. Ro (2006) probed the satisfaction of Eastern Asian students in Germany in two aspects: what international students expected and what university environment in Germany really offered; international students' capability and requirement of the study. Ro suggested that four factors play a role in deciding the satisfaction of international students: first, expectation of academic discipline-based study and personal development; second, the internal learning situation (closely related

¹⁰⁸ "favourable academic conditions" was referred by Feldhaus and Logemann (2002) as tuition free/ low tuition, big choices of courses, etc.

¹⁰⁹ Jabeen Khan (1988) used both quantitative and qualitative research to probe the psychological situation of international students in Germany.

to the learning condition), and external condition (social, financial, psychological condition, which indirectly influencing the study), and practical work and career-related study.

Living situation

Several studies examined international students' accommodation and living situation (Deutscher Städtetag, 2000; Krüger, 2001), companionship and support (Deutscher Städtetag, 2000; Isserstedt & Kandulla, 2010), financing for studies (Deutscher Städtetag, 2000; Krüger, 2001; Peroz, 2008), experience of integration or isolation¹¹⁰ (Feldhaus & Logemann, 2002), social contact and discrimination (Feldhaus & Logemann, 2002; Krüger, 2001; Peroz, 2008). The financial difficulty of international students has been paid special attention: to German students, financial support from parents is still the main source of financing, as 87% of them report that they obtain monthly 445 Euro from their parents, others either have BAföG (430 Euro) or live on their own earnings (323 Euro) (Isserstedt et al., 2010). In contrast, merely 50% international students in Germany obtain financial support for studying, while merely one-third obtain financial support from their parents, while two-thirds of international students agreed that in order to make a living, they have to find a part-time job, while the statistics among German students is 50 % (Heublein, Sommer, & Weitz, 2004).

3.4 Research on Chinese students and Chinese students studying abroad

Before reviewing the research on Chinese students, it is essential to ask: who are the Chinese students? Much research uses the term *Chinese student* in a broad manner, for example, regarding students from other Confucian-heritage culture (CHC) as Chinese students: for example, those students having Chinese origin but born in Singapore (Hwang & Francesco, 2002). Although it is true that countries in CHC share some similarities in culture and educational systems, it is important to realize that they come from different political, economical, and sociocultural background. Watkin and Biggs (1996) refer the term *Chinese learner* to CHC classrooms who are influenced by Chinese belief system, and particularly by Confucian values. So far, research on Chinese students can be divided into two categories: performance of Chinese students in Chinese settings and Chinese students residing abroad (Stevenson & Lee, 1996).¹¹¹ Cortazzi and Jin (2011) regarded the term *Chinese learner* as a “trade-off between generalization and diversity” (p.314), which covers both the perception and self-identification of Chinese students and the diversity and difference.

¹¹⁰ Feelings of prejudice and experience of discrimination.

¹¹¹ In this thesis, except for the part of literature review, the term “Chinese students” aims at the second category, i.e., Chinese students pursuing higher education level abroad.

It is important to notice, the term *Chinese students* using in the following text is defined as students who were born, grow up, and receive both primary and secondary education in (mainland) China. Chinese students from other Confucian-heritage culture (CHC) countries are not the target group in this research.¹¹²

In the last twenty years, much attention has been drawn on discussing the characters of the Chinese learner. Researchers exert themselves to explore the strategy adopted by the Chinese learners and what makes them unique (Chan & Rao, 2010). This is mainly based on two reasons: first, Chinese students consistently outperform their counterparts in other countries in cross-national studies of mathematics and science achievement (Rao & Chan, 2010, p.5). For example, latest results of PISA¹¹³ (OECD, 2010c) indicate students from Shanghai, China outscored their counterparts in dozens of other countries, in reading, math and science. Second, students from China represent by far the largest student group studying abroad. According to the OECD (2011), 18.2% of all international students enrolled in the OECD area come from China. The following text reviews Chinese students, research contexts of Chinese students, and overseas Chinese students.

3.4.1 Learning and teaching in China

Research on *Chinese students* should first take the psychological attributes, cultural values, and context into consideration (Rao & Chan, 2010). Such learning and educational background contributes to understand Chinese students' learning tradition and motivation better.

Background 1: educational system China

According to the *Education Law of the People's Republic of China*¹¹⁴, China adopts an educational system with four levels: preschool education, primary education, secondary education and higher education (see Figure 3-3).

¹¹² It is worth mentioning that some articles, whose titles are composed of "Chinese students", actually discuss about students who were of Chinese origin, but born in other Asian countries. For example, subject of "Chinese students" in Hwang, Ang, and Francesco (2002) are Chinese origin but born in Singapore.

¹¹³ PISA is the abbreviation of "Programme for International Student Assessment".

¹¹⁴ *Education Law of the People's Republic of China* (in Chinese 中华人民共和国教育法 or *zhonghua renmin guoheguo jiaoyufa*) was adopted at the Third Session of the Eighth National People's Congress on March 18, 1995, promulgated by Order No.45 of the President of the People's Republic of China on March 18, 1995 and effective as of September 1, 1995. Retrieved March 17, 2011 from <http://www.china.org.cn/english/education/184669.htm>

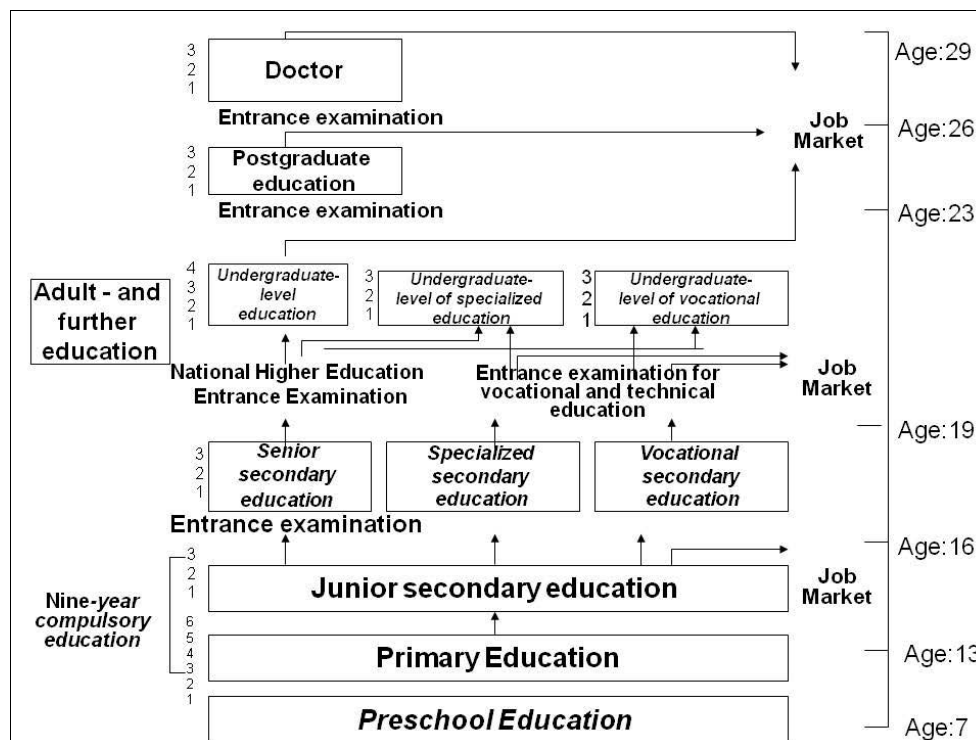


Figure 3-3: Education system in China

Source: Finnish National Board of Education, 2007, p.7; Brandenburg & Zhu, 2007, p.6

Preschool Education (in Chinese 学前教育 or *xueqianjiaoyu*) is the provision of education for children before the commencement of primary education. In China, preschool education is in the form of nursery, kindergarten and preschool-class. Among them, nursery (in Chinese 托儿所 or *tuoersuo*) and kindergarten (in Chinese 幼儿园 or *youeryuan*) are the formal preschool institutions, while preschool-class (in Chinese 学前班 or *xueqianban*) is the supplementary form of kindergarten, providing preschool education to the children in certain area where kindergartens are not available. Nursery and kindergarten are connective to each other, as the former enroll children who are younger than three-year old, while the latter recruit children who are older than three-year (Cao & Wang, 2002).

The primary education (in Chinese 初等教育 or *chudengjiaoyu*) in China normally lasts six years. Children reach the age of six enter primary schools. As China differentiates key-schools (in Chinese 重点学校 or *zhongdianxuexiao*) and non-key-schools (in Chinese 非重点学校 or *fei zhongdianxuexiao*), in the past, pupils had to take the *Junior Secondary Education Entrance Examinations* (in Chinese 小学升初中考试 or *xiaoxue sheng chuzhong kaoshi*) and strived for a seat in the key junior-middle-school. However, under the guidance of *The Resolution to Deepen Educational Reform and Carry Forward Quality Education in An All-Round Way by the Central Committee of CPC and the State Council*¹¹⁵, this examination has been abolished in various provinces and cities in succession.

¹¹⁵ The document of *The Resolution to Deepen Educational Reform and Carry Forward Quality Education in An All-Round Way by the Central Committee of CPC and the State Council* (in Chinese 中

In China, the primary education is followed by secondary education (in Chinese 中等教育 or *zhongdengjiaoyu*), which is composed of *junior secondary education* and *senior secondary education*. The six-year primary education and three-year junior secondary education (in Chinese 初中教育 or *chuzhongjiaoyu*)¹¹⁶ compose the *nine-year compulsory education* (in Chinese 九年义务教育 or *jiunian yiwu jiaoyu*)¹¹⁷. Currently, according to Ministry of Education (MoE) of the People's Republic of China, the enrollment ratio of junior secondary education among the students, ageing between 12 and 14, is 99.0%¹¹⁸. At the end of the nine-year compulsory education, students take “Zhong Kao”, the *Senior Secondary Education Entrance Examination* (in Chinese 中考), the results of which decide whether students will promote to the senior secondary education (in Chinese 高中教育 or *gaozhong jiaoyu*) or enter the job market. There are two main forms of senior secondary education: senior secondary education and senior vocational secondary school (in Chinese 中等职业教育 or *zhongdeng zhiye jiaoyu*)¹¹⁹. The former enroll students with higher scores than the latter, and is more academic-oriented, whose graduates normally hold better prospects of entering the university; while the latter provides specialized and practical education to those students who plan to enter the job market at an earlier stage. About 80% of the students, whose age is between 15 and 17, are enrolled in the senior secondary education¹²⁰. After three years of study, students take another “vital” examination—*Gao Kao* (in Chinese 高考), which decides whether they have the chance to advance to the university or go to the job market.

Before being admitted to the next stage - Higher education (in Chinese 高等教育 or *gaodeng jiaoyu*), senior secondary graduates have to take the challenging *Gao Kao*. *Gao Kao* is the abbreviation of *National Higher Education Entrance Examination in Chinese* (in Chinese 全国普通高等学校招生统一考试), taking place in June each year¹²¹, and has been called as “single-log bridge” (in Chinese 独木桥 or *dumuqiao*). In

共中央国务院关于深化教育改革全面推进素质教育的决定), which was issued on June 13, 1999, stated that where nine-year compulsory education is implemented, the Junior Secondary Education Entrance Examinations should be abolished. Retrieved March 17, 2011, from http://www.edu.cn/zong_he_870/20100719/t20100719_497966.shtml

¹¹⁶ In some cities, primary education lasts six years, which is followed by three-year junior middle school education, instead of five-year primary education and four-year junior middle school education in other cities.

¹¹⁷ According to the *Education Law of the People's Republic of China, Chapter II Basic Educational System, Article 18*, China constitutes a nine-year compulsory education system.

¹¹⁸ Source of statistics: Gross enrolment ratio of Education in China. Retrieved March 18, 2011, from Ministry of Education of China (MoE)

<http://www.moe.gov.cn/publicfiles/business/htmlfiles/moe/s4959/201012/113470.html>

¹¹⁹ According to MoE, there are four forms of senior secondary education: (1) Regular Specialized Secondary Schools, (2) Adult Specialized Secondary Schools, (3) Vocational High Schools, and (4) skilled Workers Schools. Retrieved March 18, 2011, from Ministry of Education of China (MoE) <http://www.moe.gov.cn/publicfiles/business/htmlfiles/moe/s4959/201012/113484.html>

¹²⁰ Source of statistics: Gross enrolment ratio of Education in China. Retrieved March 18, 2011, from Ministry of Education of China (MoE)

<http://www.moe.gov.cn/publicfiles/business/htmlfiles/moe/s4959/201012/113470.html>

¹²¹ *Gao Kao* takes place twice a year: one in summer and the other in early spring. Most Chinese high school student will attend the summer *Gao Kao*, which is traditional and exactly during the same period of time that they finish three-year study at the high school. Spring *Gao Kao* was first carried out in Beijing and Anhui Province in 2000.

spite of the national wide initiatives of university-expansion (in Chinese 大学扩招 or *daxue kuozhao*) launched in 1999¹²², only a small number of students survive in the furious competition, finally advancing to the university. Figure 3-4, demonstrates the gross enrolment ratio (GER) of tertiary in China between 1991 (3.5%) and 2009 (24.2%). According to the three stages of higher education development proposed by Martin Trow (1972), most industrialized countries have already reached criteria the stage of *universal Higher Education*.¹²³ In spite of the fact that the number of Chinese admitted to the university is increasing in the last decade, compared with the higher GER in North America and Western Europe (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2010), Chinese students still encounter furious competition for application.

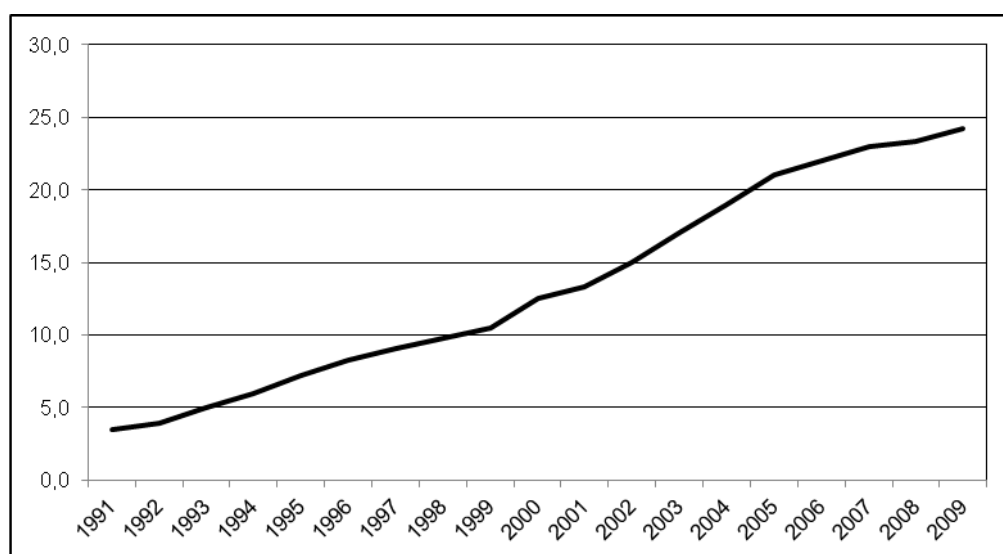


Figure 3-4: Gross enrolment ratio of tertiary enrolment in China (1991-2009)
Source: MOE of China¹²⁴

In addition, compared with graduates of regular senior middle schools, those graduates of vocational or technical schools have little chance of being admitted to universities. Instead of advancing to the higher education, they enter the labor market after graduation. However, the situation improved gradually, as there are a large number of advanced vocational/ technical colleges, recruiting graduates whose former secondary vocational and technical knowledge or practice fit their specific requirement.^{125 126}

¹²² The *Action plan for the revitalization of education for the 21st century* (in Chinese 面向 21 世纪教育振兴行动计划) issued by the MoE on 24th December, 1998, clearly stated its goal to increase the gross enrolment ratio of higher education in China to 15%. Retrieved March 18, 2011, from Ministry of Education of China (MoE)

http://www.moe.gov.cn/publicfiles/business/htmlfiles/moe/moe_177/200407/2487.html

¹²³ For example, GER in Finland is 94%, US 83%, Iceland 75%, Sweden and Spain 71%.

¹²⁴ Between the age of 18-22 Retrieved March 18, 2011, from Ministry of Education of China (MoE)

<http://www.moe.edu.cn/publicfiles/business/htmlfiles/moe/s4959/201012/113470.html#>

¹²⁵ Instead of taking *Gao Kao*, graduates of secondary vocational and technical schools take another exam specially designed for assessing their Chinese, mathematic and English knowledge (in Chinese “三校生” 高考). Take Shanghai for an example, the exams is normally hold one month than the regular *Gao Kao*. Retrieved March 19, 2011, from Shanghai Municipal Education Commission <http://www.shmec.gov.cn/html/xxgk/200403/40420040005.php>

According to MoE, in 2009, there were 2,035 regular HEIs and 350 non-public regular HEIs, 366 Adult HEIs in China, enrolling over 28 million students (including 21,446,570 undergraduate students and 1,404,942 post graduate students)¹²⁷ country wide (see Figure 3-5), which comprised about 24.2% of the college age population of eighteen to twenty-two year olds¹²⁸.

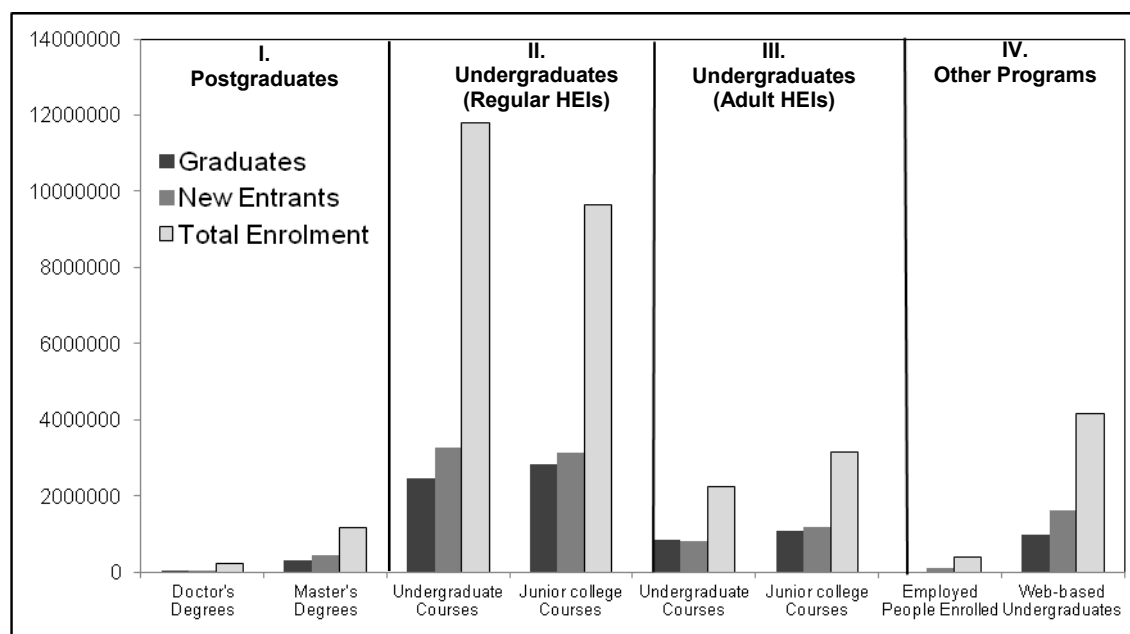


Figure 3-5: Number of students in Higher Education in China
Source: MoE of China¹²⁹

HEIs in China are under direct administration of central and local governments (CERNET, 2001a), and they are differentiated between key and non-key HEIs¹³⁰. In

¹²⁶ It is stated in the document issued by MoE that the percentage of students that enrolled by such advanced vocational and technical college should be within 5% of all the graduates of the secondary vocational and technical schools. Retrieved March 19, 2011, from Ministry of Education of China (MoE) http://www.moe.gov.cn/publicfiles/business/htmlfiles/moe/moe_1892/201001/xxgk_77150.html (in Chinese) (教育部、国家发展改革委关于下达 2008 年全国普通高等教育招生计划的 通知)

¹²⁷ Source: List of Chinese Higher Education Institutions (updated on August 30th, 2010). Retrieved March 18, 2011 from Ministry of Education of China (MoE)

¹²⁸ In 1991, the gross enrolment ratio of higher education was merely 3.5% and gradually reached 10.5% in 1999. Source of statistics: Gross enrolment ratio of Education in China. Retrieved March 18, 2011, from Ministry of Education of China (MoE)

¹²⁹ Source of statistics: Number of Students in Higher Education in China. Retrieved March 18, 2011, from Ministry of Education of China (MoE)

¹³⁰ The type of the home university makes a difference for Chinese applicants who wish to study in Germany, in terms of the admission. For example, those who graduate from a key-university/ Project 211 HEIs, they just need to accomplish 1 semester course in a Bachelor's degree and are qualified for direct subject-restricted admission in Germany, while those who graduated from non-key/ Project 211 HEIs have to finish at least 3 semesters of Bachelor's studies before they are qualified for the same admission. Retrieved March 19, 2011, from Admission Data Base of DAAD <http://www.daad.de/deutschland/wege-durchs-studium/zulassung/06550.en.html?id=7&enter.x=108&enter.y=4&ebene=2>

1954, 6 universities were nominated as key HEIs and the number continued to increase in 1959 (20)¹³¹, in 1963 (68), in 1978 (88) respectively and finally reached ninety-six in 1981 (Wang, 2008). In addition, China launched the *Project 211* (in Chinese 211 工程 or 211 gong cheng)¹³² in 1995 and *Project 985* (in Chinese 985 工程 or 985 gongcheng)¹³³ in 1998 respectively. The aim *Project 211* of is “to strengthen a number of institutions of higher learning and key disciplinary areas” (CERNET, 2001b), while the *Project 985* exerts itself to build World-Class universities and internationally renowned high-level research universities.

Background 2: exam- and teacher-oriented education

“The pursuit of knowledge is superior to all other walks of life”

万般皆下品，唯有读书高。

— *Chinese proverb*

The brief review of the educational system from kindergarten to higher education helps us to get basic knowledge of the education frame in China. Two main features can be summarized: exam-oriented and teacher-oriented education.

First, exam-oriented education caused by limited educational resources directly leads to furious competition. If one takes a close look at the figure of education system in China, he will identify that before promoting to the higher level of education, one has to first participate in the entrance exam.¹³⁴ Take the gross enrolment ratio (GER) of tertiary education as an example, we will understand why the competition is so furious in China. Many parents and students hold that the promising future depends on the fact whether one receives higher education. The key to the higher education in China is achieving a good score in *Gao Kao*: the preparation starts ever since middle school. To survive in such system, students have to develop a specific and strategic learning style. Although many strongly criticize that *Gao Kao* kills the creativity and imagination of Chinese students; and pedagogues put forward several proposals in reforming *Gao Kao* or

¹³¹ In March 1959, 16 universities have been nominated as “key-universities”. The list of these 16 universities can be found in the document *Notice of Ten documents on education work issued by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China* (in Chinese 中共中央关于印发教育工作的十个文件通知), issued on May 17, 1959. Another 4 universities were later added to the list in the same year. Retried March 20, 2011, from People's Daily Online

<http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64184/64186/66666/4493334.html> (in Chinese)

¹³²Source: Brief Introduction of “Project 211”. Retrieved March 20, 2011, from Ministry of Education of China (MoE)

http://www.moe.edu.cn/publicfiles/business/htmlfiles/moe/moe_846/200804/33122.html (in Chinese)

¹³³ Source: “Project 211” and “Project 985”. Retrieved March 20, 2011, from Ministry of Education of China (MoE)

<http://www.moe.gov.cn/publicfiles/business/htmlfiles/moe/s3603/201004/86784.html> (in Chinese)

¹³⁴ Although it is true that every country has such selecting exams, take the large number of students into consideration, the competition is extremely furious in China.

searching for its alternatives; nevertheless, so far, *Gao Kao* is still the most fair and objective evaluation form of selecting the qualified university candidates. Facing this, in order to secure a chance of obtaining higher education, Chinese students have little chance, but to exert themselves to fulfill the requirement of the exam-oriented educational system, to accord with the (local) rules, which inevitably involves enduring great academic as well as psychological pressure.

Second, teachers are dominated in the Chinese educational system. In China, “hierarchical relations obtain strongly between those who are older, senior or in authority, and those who are younger, junior or subordinate. It follows that a learner’s duty to understand and master what those in authority say” (Cortazzi & Jin, 1997, p.79). Against this background, teachers in China are highly respected. Since the first class at primary school, every Chinese student learns the importance of “respecting the teachers and valuing the education” (in Chinese 尊师重教 or *zunshizhongjiao*). Chinese students often view their teacher as a “mentor, someone who can provide advice through all stages of learning” (Chan & Drover, 1977, p.56), which might be different from the student-teacher relationship in western educational system, individuality and autonomy. Considering this, the perception of the teacher-student relationship is regarded between authority and proximity. In China, as well as in other Confucian-heritage cultures (CHC) / East Asia countries, teacher-oriented education is common. Since conformity to the given way is “highly valued” (Burnett & Gardner, 2006, p.71), raising questions at class is seldom, as students worry “ineffective teaching” (Chan, 1999, p.301) is taking place if they are continually asked in class to express their opinions. In addition to the fact that teachers are highly respected, large class sizes make the student-oriented education impossible.

Third, Chinese students highly value the “effort”. Chinese students often believe the “effort learning” (in Chinese 苦心 or *kuxin*) will make them successful (Wang & Byram, 2011) and their diligence will be paid off. Reviewing the literature on comparison between CHC and western countries, Chan and Drover (1997) referred that “people in Confucian-heritage cultures attribute success to effort and failure to lack of effort, whereas westerners tend to attribute success to ability and failure to lack ability” (p.56).

In the meantime, it is important to point out the latest educational reforms in China has strongly emphasis on developing the competence of learning how to learn (Marton & EDB Chinese Language Research Team, 2010).

Background 3: social-background /one-child generation

Most of the Chinese students currently abroad are the only child of the family (in Chinese 独生子女 or *dushengzini*), due to the one-child policy adopted in China since 1979. Under such social background, children gain more care from their parents, as well

as from the two pairs of grand-parents, they are often called as “little emperors (in Chinese 小皇帝)” of the family. Compared with their parents’ generation, this “little emperor” generation has a relatively smooth and peace life-trace and experiences less difficulty and frustration. They didn’t experience any wars or other political disturbance. Their parents experienced a tough time during their youth-time, therefore, many of them try everything possible to create a good learning environment for them and expect their son or daughter to be talent (in Chinese 望子成龙, 望女成凤 or *wangzichenglong*, *wangnüchengfeng*). The education of their son or daughter is the priority of a Chinese family. One survey conducted in 2005 indicated that Chinese family invested about 1/3 of their annual income on education.¹³⁵ In addition, the Chinese family has a high expectation on children’s academic success. A research on academic activity of Chinese, Japanese and American children indicated that three cultures differed significantly in terms of parents’ interest in their children’s academic achievement (Stevenson & Lee, 1990).^{136, 137}

3.4.2 Literature review on Chinese learners

“The rote learner”: a western paradigm

The image of Chinese students in the eyes of western scholars is:

“respectful of the lecturer’s authority; diligent note-takers; preoccupied with fulfilling the expectations of the lecturers; uncritical of information presented in the textbook and by the lecturers; seldom asking questions or volunteering to contribute to tutorial discussions; and unaware of the conventions regarding acknowledging quotes and referencing sources and therefore unwittingly guilty of plagiarism”. (Volet & Renshaw, 1996, p.205-206)

Another similar image about Chinese students is they learn “studiously and respectfully from great master teachers [...] (and) considered to rely heavily on rote memorization using a surface learning strategy, outperform their counterparts in international tests” (Law et al., 2010, p.91-95).

First, based on the behavior and interaction with lecturers at class, Chinese students have been labeled as *rote learner*, *silent learner*, *reticent learner* or *unquestioning learner* (Biggs, 1996; Liu, 2002). Compared with their western counterparts, who are

¹³⁵ Retrieved April 27, 2011 from <http://edu.people.com.cn/GB/4728917.html> (in Chinese)

¹³⁶ It is worth mention that this “80s-Generation” Chinese students grow up in a mixed (traditional Chinese and western-oriented culture) social and cultural background, which is influenced, more or less, by the western culture. They learn the foreign language at schools or university, watch the western films, and eat fast food. They get familiar with the outside world, through mass media and Internet.

¹³⁷ Under such circumstance, self-care ability is also a big challenge to them. To some, the sojourn coincided with their first trip away from their parents, if their parents live in the same city; to others, who have already accumulated the experience of being away from their parents, if the university is not located in the same city where their parents live.

actively expressing their opinions, Chinese students leave the western teachers with an impression of being inactive. Western educators feel confused how Chinese learners construed the roles of memory and understanding (Marton, 2010). Furthermore, in terms of writing, Chinese students repeating the great scholars' work as "plagiarism" in western standards (Chan, 1999), while it is a tradition in China to memorize the classic works.

Second, the current literature on Chinese students polarizes the western learners and Chinese and other Eastern Asian learners. For example, some contrast is made between the USA and East Asia educational systems according to their main purposes, instruction modes and curricular orientations (Table 3-10).

Table 3-10: Eastern versus Western educational system

	USA	East Asia
Main purpose	Focus on individual Develop individual's full potential Transmitter of cultural heritage	Focus on loyal citizenry Develop literate citizenry Helps select future leaders Transmitter of past cultural heritage
Instruction mode	Learner centered Stresses understanding, application and ability Use of educational psychology	Teacher centred Stresses recall of facts Use of rote learning Examinations as motivator
Curricular orientation	Learner active Present-future oriented Development of whole person Social interaction promoted	Learner passive Past-present oriented Strict exams to develop academic knowledge Concepts first then skills

Source: Chan, 1999, p.301

Similarly, Turner (2006) made a comparison between the "model" British students and the "model" Chinese students (see Table 3-11); while Cortazzi and Jin (1997) differentiated the expectation of between British university staff and those of some overseas students (see Table 3-12).

Table 3-11: Comparison of “model” Chinese and British students

The ‘model’ British student		The ‘model’ Chinese student
1	Any age, studying through many patterns	Young, unmarried, full-time student
2	Combines hard work and trained/natural ability	Works hard to achieve results – the harder working, the better the student
3	Active learner , asks lots of questions and participates vocally in class	Passive-receptive learner , listens to the teacher and studies privately
4	Learns by combining a range of learning skills – an active, problem-solving-based learner	Learns mainly by reading and processing knowledge
5	Meets the teacher’s suggestions with independent mind and imagination , studies in trained but personalised style	Responds to teacher direction obediently and adopts both structures and substance of study according to teacher direction
6	Intellectual and moral behaviour not an inevitable combination – the development of individual ethics	Combines intellectual capability and ‘good’ moral behaviour – a good citizen
7	May strive to ‘do one’s best’ against the standard	Highly competitive with others in cohort, strives to be the ‘best’
8	Takes a critical stance on knowledge and learning	Does not question accepted norms and ideas in the classroom
9	Contextualises learning and relates it to other aspects of life in a holistic manner	Learns within defined disciplinary rules and boundaries

Source: Turner, 2006, p.33-34

Table 3-12: Expectation of between British university staff and those of international students

British academic expectations	Academic expectations held by Chinese and other groups
Individual orientation	Collective consciousness
Horizontal relations	Hierarchical relations
Active involvement	Passive participation
Verbal explicitness	Contextualised communication
Speaker/writer responsibility	Listener/reader responsibility
Independence of mind	Dependence on authority
Creativity, originality	Mastery, transmission
Discussion, argument, challenge	Agreement, harmony, face
Seeking alternatives	Single solution
Critical evaluation	Assumed acceptance

Source: Cortazzi & Jin, 1997, p.78

Furthermore, Kingston and Forland (2008) and Gu (2009) distinguished the teaching and learning from traditions or cultural dimensions in the respectively (see Table 3-13 and Table 3-14).

Table 3-13: Summary of Socratic Versus Confucian Traditions

	Western/Socratic	Eastern/Confucian
Culture (Hofstede)	Low power distance (Individualist)	High power distance (Collectivist)
Attitude to knowledge	Extending/Speculative transforming	Conserving/ Reproducing
Academic approach	Divergent	Convergent
Learning styles for success	Deep Strategic?	Surface Rote/Superficial Strategic?

Source: Kingston, Forland, 2008, p.207

Table 3-14: Large/Small Power Distance Societies and Teaching and Learning Cultures

Large Power Distance Societies	Small Power Distance Societies
a teacher merits the respect of his/her students (Confucius)	a teacher should respect the independence of his/her students
teacher-centred education	student-centred education
students expect teacher to initiate communication	teacher expects students to initiate communication
students speak up in class only when invited by the teacher	students may speak up spontaneously in class
effectiveness of learning related to excellence of the teacher	effectiveness of learning related to amount of two- way communication in class

Source: Gu, 2009, p.44

The above comparison, to some extent, does describe some characters of Chinese students and their western counterparts; nevertheless, such description of Chinese learners is oversimplified and some conclusions have been simply reached from a western perspective. For example, a diligent Chinese student, who is regarded as a model student in China, might be viewed as rote learner in other learning cultures, where independent thinking and active participation is expected. Considering this, researchers have questioned the practice of judging Chinese students according to western standards. Volet and Renshaw (1996) pointed out that previous literature failed to fully consider “students’ cognitions and behaviours in interaction with the context in which they are embedded” (p.206). For instance, the assumption talking is connected to thinking is commonly based on a Western cultural context (Kim, 2002); while this is not the case in a Chinese class. Feng (2009) criticized the classic opposition between the “West” vs. the “Chinese” or “the individualistic vs. collectivistic” visions; Smith and Smith (1999) warned such “polarisation [...] will yield inappropriate responses on the part of instructional designers and teachers” (p.77).

Towards a new paradigm: the paradox learner

Opposite to the above “classic image” of Chinese learners from western perspective, recently, there is a large amount of literature building a “new image” of Chinese learners both from Western and Chinese perspective. Among them, three works should be emphasized: *The Chinese Learner: Cultural, psychological and contextual influences* (1996), *Teaching the Chinese Learner: Psychological and Pedagogical Perspectives* (2001), *Revisiting the Chinese Learner: Changing Contexts, Changing Education* (2010). In addition, a recent work, *Researching Chinese Learners: Skills, Perceptions and Intercultural Adaptations* (edited by Jin & Cortazzi, 2011) concerns not only teaching and learning in China, but also explores Chinese learners in international contexts. The above four major works lead a trend of reviewing and changing images Chinese learners.

John Biggs first put forwarded the concept of “The paradox of the Chinese learner” in a conference in Kathmandu, Nepal in 1992. Biggs (1996) regarded the classic image of Chinese learner as western misperception, and suggested that the “good educational practice” held by westerners could be quite wrong.

The new image of Chinese students is: instead of being passive learners, they are “independent thinkers” (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996): being active and reflective and at times “deep learners” (Biggs, 1996): seeking to understand, reflect, and question knowledge; nevertheless, Chinese students demonstrate certain qualities differently as what Western teachers have expected. Kingston and Forland (2008) also advocated that the rote-learning methods only work on the premise that understanding, indicating deep learning; they further suggested that Chinese students, against the Western stereotype, are autonomous and reflective learners as well. In addition, Chan (2010) called more attention to study the “contemporary” Chinese learner in the light of changing global and educational contexts; as students in other countries, Chinese students are seeking to developing “the capability of learn how to learn” (Marton & the EDB Chinese Language Research Team, 2010, p.133). For instance, Tait (2010) reported that Chinese students in New Zealand used memorization as a tactics, instead of simply as a surface approach, for overcoming the challenges of assessments in English as a second language. Furthermore, one comparative research among 202 first-year Australian students and 248 first-year overseas Chinese students in Australia indicates that both groups of students can rise to the demands of an educational environment where learning is highlighted (Smith, Miller, & Crassini, 1998).

3.4.3 Research on Chinese overseas students

The term *Chinese overseas student* in this thesis is defined as: Chinese students who received their primary and secondary education in mainland China and who are pursuing their tertiary education abroad. Chinese students who are studying in high school abroad, second generation immigrants who were born and grow up abroad, or Chinese from other CHC countries (e.g. Singapore-Chinese or Malaysian-Chinese) are not the target group of this research. The definition is significant to differentiate Chinese overseas students from other student groups. Previous research, in order to minimize the ambiguity, calls the Chinese overseas students as “ethnic Chinese Students” (Barker et al., 1991; Holmes, 2004; Holmes 2005), “Chinese international students” (Wei et al., 2007; Ye, 2006; Zhang, 2011; Zhu, 2007), “Chinese overseas students” (Yao, 2004), or “overseas Chinese (university) students” (Smith, Miller, & Crassini, 1998).

The number of Chinese overseas students has dramatically increased in the last decades, and Chinese students become the largest international student group in many countries. Figure 3-6, from left to right, demonstrates the 10 most popular study destinations among Chinese overseas students. First, English-speaking countries, namely, the U.S, Australia, the UK, and Canada are popular study-destinations among Chinese students. Latest OECD statistics indicate that 21.9% of all Chinese students studying abroad are studying in the US, while 14% of them choose Japan and another 12.4% students choose Australia (OECD, 2011). Second, Chinese students are the predominant foreign

student group in Korea and Japan¹³⁸. Similar cultural and alike educational systems in Korea and Japan attract Chinese students.¹³⁹ In light of historical and geographical factors, the number of Chinese dominate international student group in Korea and Japan respectively.

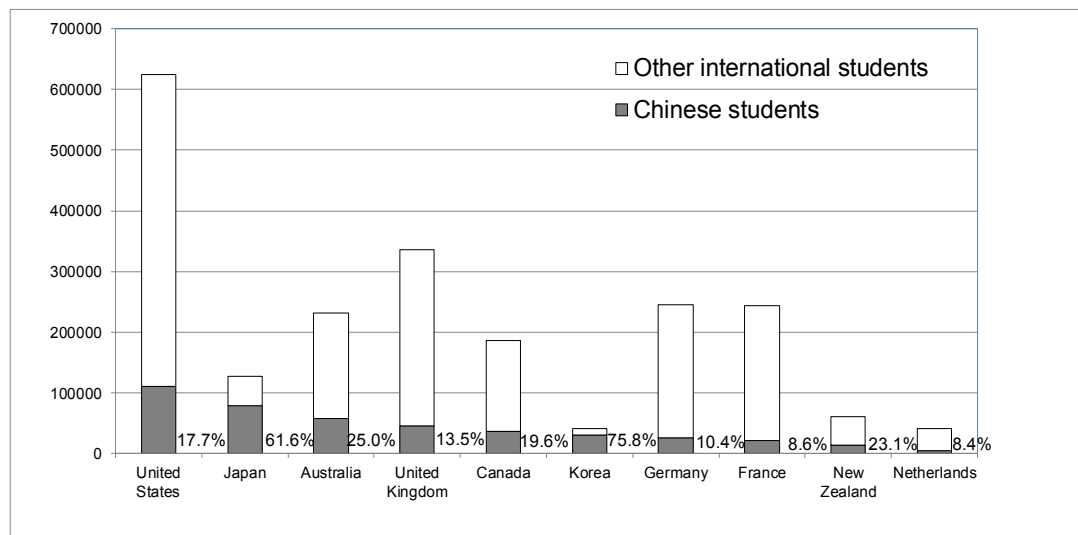


Figure 3-6: Top 10 host countries of Chinese overseas students
Source: OECD, 2010

Review of research on Chinese overseas students will be discussed from both in host country's perspective (research conducted by scholars in the host countries) and indigenous one's (research conducted by Chinese scholars in China).

A host country's perspective – research in host nations of Chinese students

Current research on Chinese overseas students mainly conducted by host countries of Chinese students (in the US, the UK, Australia, etc.) has been touching upon a diverse range of topics of Chinese overseas students: academic experience, language, adjustment/ adaptation, intercultural communication. Henze and Zhu (2012) reviewed the current research on Chinese students studying abroad and pointed out that Chinese international students were regarded as various 'constructed' entities:

- *As “customers”, Chinese students’ perception and choice of ‘selecting study destinations’ have been intensively explored, particularly in some English speaking countries;*

¹³⁸ Although Korea and China belong to the East Asian / Confucian cultural sphere, a recent survey on Chinese students in Korea reveals that the biggest problem challenging Chinese students in Korea is “cultural difference”(22.3%), followed by “health insurance” (17.3%) and “interpersonal relationship” (17.4%). Retrieved March 20, 2011, from <http://studyabroad.tigtag.com/experience/66450.shtml> (in Chinese)

¹³⁹ Similarly, to German students, France, Spain, and the UK are the three most popular countries (Isserstedt & Link 2008, p.53)

- *As a source of “irritation”, the presence of Chinese students in the host institutions requires the change at both institutional and individual level;*
- *As a challenge and option for mutual learning and mutual enrichment;*
- *As the world’s largest mobile academic potential, Chinese students lead to intensive competition within a worldwide market of top-level manpower;*
- *As a special reference group for general research on culture shock, adaptation and adjustment*

(Henze & Zhu, 2012, p.91).

This thesis reviews the previous research on overseas Chinese students in a chronological order: pre-departure, studying and living in the host country, and finishing the study. Figure 3-7 demonstrates landscape of current research on Chinese students studying abroad.

Pre-departure situation

Compared with the research on Chinese students’ learning and intercultural experience abroad, research on the pre-departure situation (motivation, pre-knowledge about the host country or university system) has been paid less attention. It is worth noting that research on the pre-departure situation of Chinese students was mainly conducted in the English-speaking countries; therefore, these countries, such as Australia and New Zealand, pay much attention to probe Chinese students’ satisfaction in the perspective of international education industry (Pan et al., 2008; Zhang & Brunton, 2007). Hence, regarding Chinese students as “customer”, these countries often attach importance to the perception and choice of Chinese students at the pre-departure period.

First, Mazzarol et al. (2001) explored how Chinese students selected a country for overseas study, and found that English-speaking countries were popular among Chinese prospect students, with the US and the UK as the “First Tier” (for their world-renowned reputation), while Canada, Australia and New Zealand as the “Second Tier” (for their attractive environment). Malcolm, Ling, and Sherry (2004) similarly found that Chinese students choose New Zealand for its security and English-speaking country-identity. Second, Chirkov et al. (2007) investigated the role of two motivational factors (preservation and self-determination factor) in Chinese students’ decision to study abroad, and found that self-determination factors had an independent effect on cultural adaptation of the students. Third, Chinese students do not have sufficient prior knowledge of academic conventions practiced in New Zealand before their arrival, which leads to the difficulty in writing assignments, essay and report (Campbell & Li, 2007).

Studying in a foreign country

One of the key aspects of the current empirical research on Chinese overseas students is their learning experience in the new educational setting. The following text will review the difficulties that Chinese students encounter at a foreign university and main reasons leading to their problems.

Difficulties that Chinese students encounter at the host university. Chinese students encounter difficulties in participation at class and lack certain academic skills.

First, Chinese students have low participation at class. Current empirical research reveals that Chinese overseas students do not demonstrate satisfactory performance or engagement at class.: silence and reticence has long been regarded as classroom communication behavior of Chinese students studying abroad (Liu, 2002). Different explanations have been provided by interational research: Foreign language skill is one of the biggest barriers (Zhu, 2007) that prevent Chinese students from participating in the activities at class, particularly in the initial phase of overseas study. For instance, Chinese students studying in Australia encountered special difficulties in dealing with tutorials, as they did not know how to behave or express their opinions in English confidently (Barker. et al, 1991); At a teacher-oriented class, to obey the authority and respect class “harmony” (Holmes, 2008) is regarded as a virtue in Chinese academic culture; while in western academic culture, to challenge the teacher, to express one’s own opinion, and to think critically is highly valued (Holmes, 2004). Furthermore, Chinese students avoid offending supervisor’s senior and superior role (Stephens, 1997). Liu (2001) further suggested that the problem is caused by Chinese students’ perception of face saving, politeness, and social identity. Zhou, Knoke, and Sakamoto (2005) attributed the “reciprocal cultural familiarity and power differentials between different languages, cultures and knowledge” (p.307) to the “silence” at class. Holmes (2004) pointed out that considering difficulties in listening, understanding, and interacting, Chinese students were not familiar with the skills of involving themselves in discussions.

Second, Chinese students lack necessary academic skills. In addition to the silence at class, Chinese students’ have insufficient academic writing and oral foreign language skills (Durkin, 2008; Zhu, 2007). One problem concerning Chinese students’ academic writing is plagiarism, although it is true that some native students probably experience similar problems (Kingston & Forland, 2008). Holmes (2004) regarded the allegiance to the established authorities in Chinese learning culture was a main reason resulting in the plagiarism. Furthermore, Holmes explained that students who hadn’t mastered the foreign language well tended to write in a close manner with the original text. In addition, each discipline has its own “grammar”, which makes the dissertation writing even more challenging to Chinese students (Pilcher, Cortazzi, & Jin, 2011). In terms of speaking, although most international students did meet the minimum language requirement before being admitted to the courses, they lack the language skills such as “rules for speaking” and “turn taking” (Lewthwaite, 1996).

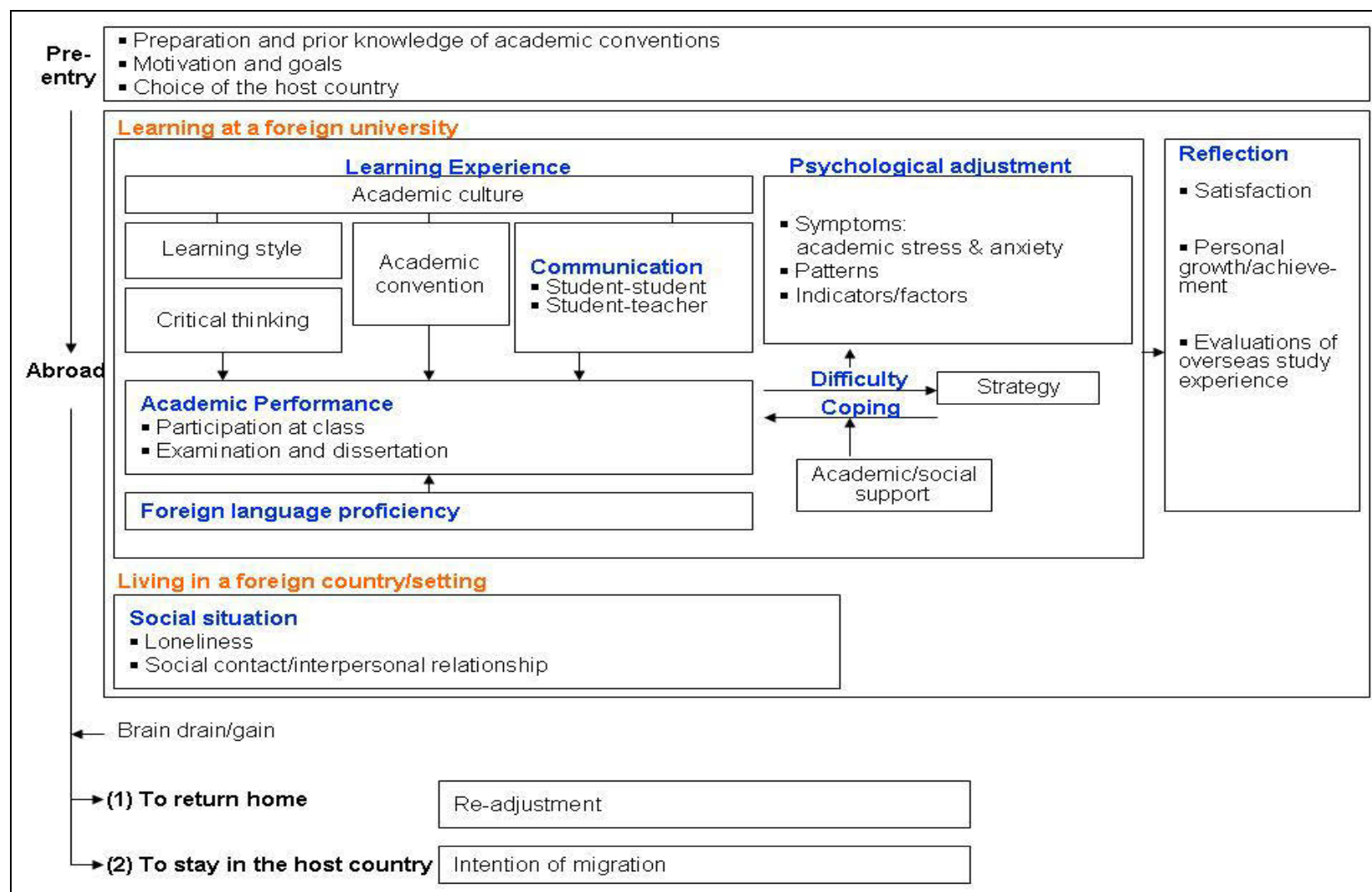


Figure 3-7: Landscape of current research on Chinese students

Intercultural communication in learning environment. In addition to the participation and academic skills, Chinese students' social interaction with non-Chinese was consistently identified as problematic (Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006).

First, student-teacher relationship: Yan and Berliner (2009) reported that Chinese overseas students tended to use vague language, and request indirectly when communicating with lecturers. Hui (2005) suggested that low contact between Chinese overseas students and their Australian lecturers accounting for Chinese students' difficulties in integrating to the host academic communities. In addition to the foreign language insufficiency, which discourages Chinese students from communicating with their supervisor, Cornelius, Gray and Constantinople (1990) pointed out that division of the curriculum, time in the semester, and college were the major variables influencing the student-faculty interaction.

Second, student-student relationship: Chinese overseas students often encountered difficulties in establishing collaborative relationships with their peer students in the host country (Chen, 2004; Holmes, 2005). Take overseas Chinese students in the UK as an example, only 15% of Chinese students reported that they had British friends (UKCOSA, 2004); while British students mentioned that Chinese student community "apparently inward-looking and even unwelcoming when individuals have made overtures of friendship" (Turner, 2002, p.18). It is worth mentioning that this phenomenon is not typical to Chinese students, as one research indicated half of the international students reported the difficulty of getting to know and work with the local students in the UK (Gu, Schweisfurth, & Day, 2010).

Third, reasons resulting in the difficulties: It is necessary to point out that research on Chinese overseas students emphasized Chinese students' "unique" learning style through comparison between Confucius and Socrates cultures learning milieu: (i) Different academic cultures -- Each culture of learning works in its own learning environment; however, when one student transfers from one academic culture to the other, problems might emerge. Currently, researchers in the host country explored the conflict caused by difference of learning and teaching for Chinese students. Researchers explained that the difficulty Chinese students encounter is resulted from the different cultures of learning between Confucian and Socratic academic cultures: difference of academic discourse expectation regarding critical thinking and argumentation (Durkin, 2011; Wan, Chapman, & Biggs, 1992), perceptions of the dissertation process (Pilcher, Cortazzi, & Jin, 2011), expectation of teaching and learning styles (Choo, 2007; Jin & Cortazzi, 1997-98; Lin, 2002; Wang & Byram, 2011), perception of cultural adjustment problems (Jenkins & Galloway, 2009), and assessment (Tait, 2010; Zhu, 2007) between Chinese students and the lecturers of the host country. Moreover, Holmes (2006) found that Chinese students concern of "face and maintaining roles, harmony and relationships" (p.28) were not compatible with the rules for competent classroom communication in the host country. In dealing with the difference, the majority Chinese

students opted for a “*Middle Way*” (Durkin, 2008), a strategy that synergizes the traditional cultural academic values held by many Chinese students with Western academic norms; or demonstrate a concept of “*third space*” (Feng, 2009), which contests binary or polar opposites between Confucian and Socratic cultures of learning. (ii) Chinese students are not familiar with the academic difference between home and host country: In spite of the difference of learning cultures, Chinese students are not familiar with the new learning setting in the host country. Lin, Endler and Kocovski (2001) found that the lack of familiarity with the adopted culture and language may contribute to adjustment difficulties encountered by Chinese students studying in Canada; similarly, it is indicated that Chinese students studying in New Zealand were not prepared for the dialogic nature of classroom communication in the host country and encountered difficulties in listening, understanding, interacting, and writing (Holmes, 2004). One Chinese students studying in the US indicated “the problem is not because we are incapable of doing things excellently, but because we are lacking the experience of handling the America university environment” (Sun & Chen, 1999, p.27).

Psychological issues: fight against stress

Based on the above review of Chinese overseas students’ learning experience, it is not difficult to imagine that different learning experience and intercultural communication at class might cause the psychological challenge.

Psychological adjustment. Similar to the research on international students, inspired by Ward and her colleagues’ cross-cultural adjustment, researchers probed Chinese students’ psychological and sociocultural adjustment in the US (Wang, 2009) and in the UK (Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006) respectively. In addition, there is a large amount of research probed the acculturation, adjustment, adaptation, and other elements of psychological health of Chinese overseas students, in terms of their acculturation and subjective well-being (Zheng, Sang, & Wang, 2004), the role of media playing for Chinese students’ acculturation (Yang et al., 2004), psychological adaptation (Zheng & Berry, 1991), anxiety (Lin, Endler, & Kocovski, 2001), transitional stress (Jou & Fukada, 1996c), social self-efficacy (Lin & Betz, 2007), self-ratings of confidence with English, indicators of assimilation and psychological adjustment (Pak, Dion, & Dion, 1985), and cross-cultural adjustment in Japan (Jou & Fukada, 1996a).

Stressor. Jou and Fukada (1996d) classified the stressors among Chinese students in Japan into five factors: interpersonal problems, academic problems, health/living problems, financial anxiety, and environmental problems. Pan et al. (2008) similarly summarized five major domains of acculturative stressors that challenge Chinese students studying abroad: language, academic, psychosociocultural, financial, and political issues. Take the language as an example, Chinese students encounter language anxiety (Cheng & Erben, 2011) and language learning strategies (Gao, 2005; Gao, 2006). In addition, Lu (1990) identified that homesickness is a common psychological reaction amongst Chinese students studying in the UK.

Symptoms. It is reported that Chinese students are more likely to be concerned about a fear of failure (Smith & Smith, 1999). Chinese students studying in the US encounter high academic stress (Yan & Berliner, 2009). Compared with their counterpart in the host country, Chinese students reported higher levels of anxiety (Lin, Endler, & Kocovski, 2001). In addition, Wei et al. (2007) found out that a positive association between acculturative stress and depression among Chinese students. Considering this, Chinese overseas students' psychological health also catches researchers' attention. Current research concerning psychological issue of Chinese students mainly covers two fields: adjustment (acculturation and adaptation) and social support. Another difficulty which faces Chinese students studying abroad is loneliness. Being (far) away from parents and friends, international students sometimes encounter loneliness. Based on 200 intensive interviews, Sawir et al. (2008) found that two thirds of the international students in Australia experienced problems of loneliness, particularly in the early months. Another study identified international students are more likely to experience moderate to severe clinical depression and loneliness than their counterparts in the host country (Oei & Notowidjojo, 1990). The current situation of loneliness and depression among Chinese students, as well as international students from other countries, calls for more adequate personal and social support.

Academic and social support. Facing the above psychological challenge, more research sheds light on the solution to deal with it, and social and academic support system for Chinese students attracts increasing attention. Jou and Fukada (1997) discussed the stress and support of mental and physical health of Chinese students in Japan. Previous research reviewed the form (traditional and online) of support networks (Ye, 2006) and analyzed the effect of social support on the adjustment (Jou & Fukada, 1995a, 1995b, 1996b), and the result of which indicated that support plays a significant role of Chinese students' adjustment.

Living in a foreign country

In addition to the academic and psychological topics, another problem that research on Chinese students often refers is the social contact and financing difficulty in the host country.

Social contact in the host country: staying close to other Chinese students. Chinese students reported having a large co-national circle of friends. Instead of contacting the students in the host country, Chinese students often stick to their co-national friends (Klein et al., 1971; Turner, 2002). However, such "gravitation toward compatriots" (Brown, 2009, p.446) is not specific only to Chinese students: other international students are also inclined to have friends from the same culture (Bochner, 1981; Church, 1982). One classic research with over 2,500 international students in 11 countries conducted by Klineberg and Hull (1979) demonstrated that international students had primary bonds with co-nationals. A survey in the UK indicated that 59% of international students were much more closely integrated with co-nationals and other

international students than with UK students (UKCOSA, 2004). In addition, one research reported 70% Japanese international students regarded their compatriots as their “first three closet persons” in the UK and this longitudinal research further pointed out that such tendency of approaching to their co-national friends among Japanese students stays stable over the year (Ayano, 2006, p.22); Trice and Elliott (1993) found that Japanese students in the US spend 88% of study time and 82% of social time with Japanese.

Financial problems. Another problem that Chinese students meet in living in a foreign country is the financial difficulty. China is a developing country and the average income of a Chinese family is relative low. Furthermore, the majority Chinese students studying abroad are self-funded students, the financial difficulty does become one problem for Chinese students (Feng, 1991). The financial difficulty results in other problems: since some Chinese students have to take part-time job at weekends, they have little time in participating in other social activities; furthermore, in order to save money, they choose to live together, which in turn leaves them few opportunities to speak and practice the language with local people (Feng, 1991). All this further leads to their poor foreign language, which again prevents them from making friends, which in turn isolated them from contacting the host culture.

Daily life. There is a large amount other topics discussed Chinese students’ cultural identities (Ding, 2009), cultural values (Lowe & Corkindale, 1998), gambling (Li, Hodgetts, & Ho, 2006), holiday behaviours (Ryan & Zhang, 2007), name change (Kang, 1971), and eating problems (Davis & Katzman, 1999). For instance, a national-wide research in New Zealand indicated that, compared with international students from other countries, Chinese students tended to be the least satisfied with aspects of their accommodation, *homestay* arrangements and social support, less likely to want more New Zealand friends (Ministry of Education of New Zealand, 2008).

Conclusion of the current empirical research on Chinese students

First, in terms of research method, the majority empirical research explored the adjustment of Chinese students based on the standard psychological scale, while the number of research using qualitative method is still limited (see Appendix 4). Although standard psychological scales do help us to understand the psychological health of Chinese overseas students, we should bear in mind that a large number of these scales are developed by western psychologists, which are based on western academic cultures.¹⁴⁰ In spite of the fact that longitudinal research can demonstrate Chinese overseas students’ adjustment in a dynamic manner, the number of research using longitudinal research is still small.¹⁴¹ Furthermore, cross-sectional analyses

¹⁴⁰ In addition, Chinese overseas students are required to finish the scale in English.

¹⁴¹ For instance, Zheng and Berry (1991) followed the psychological adaptation of Chinese students in Canada for 3 periods (pre-departure, 2 months, and 4 months after arrival) and found that although Chinese students faced more problems than their counterpart in the host country, they use fewer health

includes control groups (peers in the host country or Chinese students in China) helps us better understand the situation of adjustment of Chinese students (Lin et al., 2001; Zheng & Berry, 1991).

Against the background of using standard psychological scale, recent research adopts an innovative approach to follow the process of adjustment/ adaptation among Chinese students. For example, researchers included the drawing session to follow the recursive fashion of acculturation (Burnett & Gardner, 2006). In addition, Li (2004) did a narrative inquiry to record the challenges Chinese students face in brand new educational, cultural and social environment. Spencer-Oatey and Xiong (2006) included interviews to supplement the standard scales of psychological and sociocultural adjustments; and Spurling (2006) used in-depth interviews to investigate the adjustment of Chinese students. Furthermore, an increasing amount of research uses ethnographic approach to investigate Chinese students' adjustment (Lam, 2006), and Chinese overseas students' learning and intercultural communication (Holmes, 2004).

Second, there are a large number of Chinese scholars abroad exerting themselves to conduct research on Chinese overseas students, many of whom are doctoral students (Chen, 2004; Guan, 2007; Song, 2009; Wang, 2009; Wang, 2010; Zhao, 2007), master students (Gao, 2006; Guan, 2010), and visiting scholars at a foreign university.¹⁴² Taking advantage of their language and co-national identity, they conduct research in Chinese language, which makes Chinese students freely share their overseas experience without any language barrier. Moreover, the good and trusting relationship established encourages Chinese students to share their experience freely and facilitate the research (Li, 2004). The researchers' Chinese identity helps them to obtain first hand information and understand the difficulty that challenges Chinese students.

Furthermore, much research on Chinese students conducted in non-English countries is less well known, due to the problem of foreign language. For example, considering the fact that Chinese students account for 78.5% and 61.6% of foreign students in South Korea and Japan, little is known to the academic literature in English. Take Germany as an example, to the author's best acknowledge, except for one study (Song, 2009) and He (2009), the current research concerning Chinese students are in German language.

A Chinese indigenous perspective – research conducted by Chinese scholars

Term of “Chinese overseas students”: liuxue sheng (留学生)

“Going abroad for study” in Chinese is called *liuxue* (留学), and student studying abroad is regarded as *liuxue sheng* (留学生). Nevertheless, the Chinese equivalent

ways during acculturation than at pre-departure; Jou and Fukada (1996b) conducted a 4-period (before arrival, 3 months, 9 months, and 21 months) longitudinal research, investigating the influences of social supports and personality on adjustment.

¹⁴² The result of their research is presented in the form of master or doctoral thesis.

liuxue sheng alone does not clearly separate the group of Chinese students studying abroad from international students studying in China, which makes the review of previous research on Chinese students in Chinese language complicated. In terms of international students studying in China, they are called *laihua liuxue sheng* (来华留学生, overseas students coming to China), *zaihua liuxue sheng* (在华留学生, overseas students in China), *guoji liuxue sheng* (国际留学生, international students) or *waiguo liuxue sheng* (外国留学生, foreign students); while Chinese students studying abroad are called *chuguo liuxue sheng* (出国留学, students going abroad for study), *haiwai zhongguo liuxue sheng* (海外中国留学生, Chinese students studying overseas) or *liu “X” zhongguo xuesheng* (留 X 中国学生, Chinese students in X-country). Considering this, the review of indigenous perspective requires the discrimination of the content, instead of simply searching for title or keyword as “留学生 (overseas students)”.

Using “留学生” as topic-word¹⁴³, the author searched “China Doctoral Dissertations Full-text Database (CDFD)”¹⁴⁴ and China Master’s Theses Full-text Database (CMFD), and obtained the following results (see Table 3-15).

Table 3-15: Previous research on Chinese overseas students from Chinese indigenous perspective

Database	Topic-word ¹⁴⁵	Relative	Topic				
			Historical perspective: impact of returned Chinese students	Empirical perspective: Students currently studying abroad	Returnees (Readjustment & Job/Starting business)	Literary perspective: Literature concerning Chinese overseas students	Others: policy of studying abroad
CDFD	172	→17	5 (29.4%)	2 (11.8%)	1 (5.9%)	6 (35.3%)	3 (17.6%)
CMFD	1968	→151	89 (59.0%)	16 (10.6%)	15 (9.9%)	12 (7.9%)	19 (12.6%)

Note 1: The information is based CDFD and CMFD.

Status: February 2, 2012

Note 2: The table is compiled by the author.

¹⁴³ The reason that the author uses topic-word, instead of keyword is: in terms of the searching result provided by searched “China Doctoral Dissertations Full-text Database (CDFD)”, and China Master’s Theses Full-text Database (CMFD), the search using keyword “留学生(overseas students)” brings fewer results of entries than topic-word. Take CMFD for example, keyword “留学生” finds 429 entries, while topic-word finds 1,968 entries. The further research within the 1,968 entries indicates that some relevant theses are missing in the 429 entries. Base on this reason, the author uses topic-word in order to avoid missing information.

¹⁴⁴ CDFD and CMFD provide dissertations/theses from 383 doctoral and 538 master training institutions respectively across China, which covers the collection of thesis from 1984.

¹⁴⁵ Some theses are titled as “留 X (中国) 学生” (Chinese/students studying in X-country) or “中国留 X 学生 (Chinese overseas students in X-country)”. Taking the fact of expression of Chinese words into consideration, the current searching results are based on the topic word as “overseas students”, “Chinese students in X-country” or Chinese overseas students in X-country.

Research on impact of returned Chinese students

Research on returning Chinese students and their impact on the development of modern China is one of the features of the indigenous research. Those Chinese students once studied in Japan, in the former Soviet Union, and in the US returned and brought back the advanced technologies and new ideas to China. Research has emphasized the contribution of returned Chinese students in the field of aviation, naval science-technology, geology, biology, physics, chemical industry, agriculture, modern education, mathematics, architecture, and modern medical institution, which plays a decisive role in the construction of modern China. So far, over 89 master theses (accounting for 59% of the master's thesis on Chinese students overseas) and 5 doctoral theses (accounting for about 30% of the doctoral thesis on Chinese students overseas) reviewed the Chinese overseas students from a historical perspective. In addition, returnees in the academic fields continued making contributions to the scientific research. Take the *Chinese Academy of Sciences* (CAS) and *Chinese Academy of Engineering* (CAE)¹⁴⁶ as an example, which are two leading and prestigious academic institutions and comprehensive research centers in natural science and engineering in China, and membership of which represents the highest level of national honor for Chinese scientists. A recent survey among the academicians in these two research institutions indicated that among academicians who have been entitled by CAS and CAE between 1955 and 2009, about 37% of them have overseas learning or research experience¹⁴⁷ and 42% of them graduated once studied in the US, followed by 22% from the former soviet union, 12% from the UK; others studied in Germany, Japan, France, Canada, Switzerland, Australia and Poland.¹⁴⁸ In addition, 77% of the presidents of the state key universities have overseas learning experience, and over ten thousand enterprises have been established by the returnees who studied abroad (Wang, 2011). Furthermore, several ministers of the central government in China own an overseas studying or academic experience. For example, current Foreign Minister, Yang Jiechi (杨洁篪), Minister of Science and Technology, Wan Gang (万钢), and Minister of Health, Chen Zhu (陈竺).¹⁴⁹

In the last decade, an increasing amount of research has paid close attention to the returned Chinese students. According to People's Daily Online "A total of 497,400

¹⁴⁶ Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS) and Chinese Academy of Engineering (CAE) were established in 1949 and 1994 respectively. Retrieved March 21, 2011 from Chinese Academy of Science <http://english.cas.cn/ACAS/> and Chinese Academy of Engineering <http://www.cae.cn/en/>

¹⁴⁷ Among these 700 academicians who achieved overseas degree, 79.05% of them own doctoral degree, 13.55% obtained master degree, and 7.26% acquired bachelor degree.

¹⁴⁸ People's Daily Online(人民网). (2009). 中国两院院士学历构成: 高学历成院士新标签. Retrieved from <http://scitech.people.com.cn/GB/10546557.html> (in Chinese)

¹⁴⁹ Yang Jiechi studied in the London School of Economics from 1973 to 1975, and Wan Gang achieved his doctoral degree from the Department of Mechanical Engineering in Clausthal University of Technology, Germany. Chen Zhu obtained his PhD from the Université Paris 7 - Denis Diderot in Paris, France. Retrieved March 24, 2011, from http://news.xinhuanet.com/ziliao/2007-06/29/content_6308495.htm (in Chinese)

overseas Chinese students have returned to China between 1978 and 2009”¹⁵⁰. China launched initiatives such as “The Recruitment Program of Global Experts” in 2008¹⁵¹. In addition, over 150 pioneer parks (in Chinese 留学人员创业园 or *liuxue renyuan chuangyeyuan*)¹⁵² accommodates 8,000 businesses and more than 20,000 returning overseas students, aiming attracting more Chinese students who graduated abroad. Against this background, indigenous research covered (1) readjustment, re-entry (Lü, 2009), repatriate adjustment (Zhao, 2010), and “cultural identity and reverse cultural shock” (Yin, 2008), “reverse culture adaptation” (Qie, 2010), living environment and state (Liu, 2010) of returning Chinese students; (2) the policy of setting-up-business (in Chinese 创业 or *chuangye*) towards returning Chinese overseas students; (3) brain drain and brain gain (Cui, 2010; Liu, 2006) human resources/ talent management (Liu, 2010; Pan, 2007; Wang, 2008). The focus on returning Chinese students is another feature of indigenous perspective on research of Chinese students.

Empirical research on Chinese overseas students

In light of the geographic distance, in the past decades, researchers and scholars in China have difficulty in accessing the Chinese students studying overseas, compared with their counterparts in the host countries. Recently, indigenous research has shown more research interest in Chinese overseas students.¹⁵³ Against the background that the number of Chinese students studying abroad is increasing, more interest in their current overseas experience is also increasing. In addition, with the development of online-survey techniques, researchers can easily initiate an online-questionnaire without leaving China.¹⁵⁴ This partly explains the reason why it is until recently that indigenous researchers have been gradually catching up with the research. Table 3-15 indicated that, over one-tenth research of all CDFD and CMFD focus on Chinese overseas students’ acculturation or cross-cultural adjustment.

So far, indigenous researchers have explored Chinese overseas students’ acculturation or cross-cultural adjustment in the US (Fan, 2004; Li, 2011; Zhang, 2008), in the UK (Liu, 2008), in Germany (He, 2009); in France (Xu, 2010) and in Finland (Cai, 2009). In addition to acculturation or cross-cultural adjustment, other scholars explored Chinese students’ academic adjustment (Zhu, 2008), anxiety and uncertainty in communication with host nationals (Wang, 2008), and intercultural and interpersonal

¹⁵⁰ Retrieved January 31, 2012, from People's Daily Online
<http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90001/90776/90883/6925012.html>

¹⁵¹ In Chinese 海外高层次人才引进计划 or in short, called “千人计划” (“1,000 Talents Program”)
<http://www.1000plan.org/>

¹⁵² Retrieved February 3, 2012, from http://news.xinhuanet.com/edu/2011-08/22/c_131066712.htm

¹⁵³ To the best of the author’s knowledge, the earliest research concerning Chinese overseas students’ acculturation and adjustment (CDFD and CMFD) was conducted by (Fan, 2004).

¹⁵⁴ It is import to point out the frequent academic exchanges between Chinese universities and partner universities abroad also make it possible for some indigenous researchers or scholars conduct research abroad.

aspects of the communication between Chinese graduate students and their advisors in the host country (Wang, 2008).

In addition to the research on master and doctoral level, there are several documentary reports and novellas describing the life and study of Chinese students abroad, for instance: *Bitter peaches and plums: two Chinese novellas on the recent Chinese student experience in Australia* (by Jacobs et al., 1995), *Christmas in summer* (in Chinese 夏天的圣诞 or *xiatian de shengdan*) in New Zealand (Xi & Gu, 2006), *Studying Abroad and: The problems from Chinese overseas students rubbish* (in Chinese 留学&垃圾 or *liuxue laji*) (Chen, 2004).

3.5 Research on Chinese students studying in Germany

Perspectives from both historical and empirical research (adjustment problems, social and financial situation) have shed light on Chinese students¹⁵⁵ studying in Germany. It has been over 135 years since the first group of Chinese was sent to Germany for military training in 1877, in order to learn the advanced technique from Germany (Harnisch, 2000)¹⁵⁶. Later in 1906, after study tour in Europe, the government-commission chose two universities and two technical institutions (Chen, 2000). Later, as the diplomatic ties broke up between the two countries during the WW I and WW II, the study of Chinese students in Germany was interrupted (Meng, 2000). Harnisch (2000) and Meng (2005) drew a retrospective look on the education of Chinese students in Germany from 1860 to 1845 and from 1861 to 2001 respectively. Meng (2005) reviewed the process of their integration in German culture as well as their reintegrated problems back to China in details. Recently, the historical development of Chinese students and their experience of learning, living and working in Berlin and the stay of some prestigious Chinese scholars and scientists such as Cai Yuanpei (in Chinese 蔡元培), Wang Ganchang (in Chinese 王淦昌), etc. have been well recorded, on the occasion of celebrating the 120 anniversaries of Chinese students at German universities (Kaderas, 2000).

3.5.1 Research on Chinese students in Germany

The research interest in Chinese students has been recently increasing in Germany

Previously, Chinese students are regarded as part of “Asian students”, instead of single target group. For instance, research explored the (East) Asian students’ mentoring

¹⁵⁵ The target group of this research is Chinese students who are *Bildungsausländer*, or mobile foreign students. Except for special explanation, in this thesis, international students are mainly referred as *Bildungsausländer*.

¹⁵⁶ The seven Chinese were: Bian Changsheng, Zhu Yaocai, Wang Desheng, Yang Deming, Zha Lianbiao, Yuan Yuchun and Liu Fangpu (Harnisch, 2000, p.28).

(Zeilinger, 2006), adjustment (Chen, 1995) and satisfaction at German universities (Ro, 2006) included Chinese students as part of the target student group. It is until recently that Chinese students become the focus of the research. Table 3-16 listed the empirical research concerning Chinese students in Germany, which touched upon the following topics: adjustment and integration (Guan, 2007; Guan 2010); learning experience (Luo, 2011; Zhou, 2010); cultural experience (Song, 2009); and living and financial situation (Mao, 2010). In addition, Oblau (2006) reported the Chinese students in Germany from a religious perspective and searched for chances of Christian encounters.

Compared with research on Chinese students studying in other countries, Chinese students studying in Germany share some common problems; in the meantime they face the same problems that confront anybody living in a foreign culture, such as language problems, accommodation difficulties, financial stress and loneliness. Here are two main findings:

Table 3-16: Empirical research focusing on Chinese students in Germany¹⁵⁷

Topic	Type/Author	Research Method	Research perspective/ standard scale	Focus
Adjustment & integration	Doctoral Thesis (Guan, 2007)	Questionnaire (N=73)	Psychological ▪ Scale: <i>Frankfurter Selbstkonzeptskalen</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Language proficiency ▪ Study ▪ Social contact ▪ Financial situation
Adjustment	Magister Thesis (Guan, 2010)	Interview (N=3)	Sociological ▪ Biographical research ▪ Narrative interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Language problems ▪ Learning problems ▪ Financial problems ▪ Contact with natives
Cultural experiences & intercultural training program	Doctoral Thesis (Song, 2009)	Questionnaire (N=178) Interview (N=17)	Psychological	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Cultural difference ▪ Cross-cultural adjustment & intercultural training
Culture-specific learning styles	Survey (Luo, 2011)	Interview (N=15+15=30)	(Inter-)cultural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Learning style
Learning experience	Survey (Zhou, 2010)	Questionnaire (N=175) + Interview (N=17)	Sociological	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Motivation ▪ Preparation ▪ Situation and process of study ▪ Social contact and daily life ▪ Career planning
Living & financial situation	Survey (Mao, 2010)	Questionnaire (N=154)	Sociological	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Language proficiency ▪ Accommodation, food & financing

Note: the above table is compiled by author.

The insufficient German language proficiency. Unlike English, which is taught as the first foreign language in China, German is the second foreign language to Chinese

¹⁵⁷ Research conducted on Asian students in Germany (although Chinese students are included) is not listed (for instance, Ro (2006) and Chen (1995), as Chinese students are not focused.

students. A recent survey on Chinese students in Berlin (Mao, 2010) reported that although more than half of them learned German language in China (56%), and the rest began German learning in Germany (44%), while another survey revealed that over 91% of the international students have learned German before they started the study in Germany and 86% of them have learned German more than 6 months (Peroz, 2008)¹⁵⁸. In order to apply to the German universities, Chinese students attended courses either at universities or private language schools (Zhou, 2010), nevertheless, such short period of learning experience before studying in Germany is far from enough to handle the daily academic task at German universities. Arriving in Germany, most Chinese students preferred to turn to books and media, instead of improving their German language through talking with the native Germans (Guan, 2007). Chinese students are not confident of their German language. Mao (2010) reported only 27% of Chinese students regarded their German language as “good” or “very good”, based on an empirical survey in Berlin.

Learning difficulty. In addition to the insufficient language problem, Chinese students meet learning difficulty as well. Sun (2010) compared the intercultural difference of university study between German and Chinese universities and indicated that the former emphasized the self-organization of studies, while the latter was central-organization-oriented. Such difference becomes a big challenge to Chinese students, as Zhou (2010) reported that over 45% Chinese students had difficulty in the organization of their studies, and 43.5% were even not so confident of managing their studies in Germany. Facing the challenge, 71.4% would turn to their Chinese friends for help, about half of them would asked their German classmates for a favor; while over 20% indicated that they didn’t receive help from others.

Daily life. In the meantime, Chinese students meet social isolation in Germany: 54.8% Chinese students participating Zhou’s (2010) study reported that they had few friends and agreed that they were alone or felt lonely in Germany. Zhou (2010) further found that it was not the length of stay in Germany, but the age of the Chinese students that has an influence establishing new contact and friendship. In addition, Chinese students have financial problems in Germany (Chen, 1995), as the majority of Chinese students are self-funded students and depend on their parents or searching for a part-time job to finance their study and to make both ends meet in Germany.

Conclusion of the previous research

Reviewing the research on Chinese students in Germany, we will find three features: (1) compared with the large number of Chinese students in Germany, relative little research has been so far conducted; (2) compared with the general experience (language, accommodation, intercultural communication) in Germany, Chinese students’ academic

¹⁵⁸ The survey was conducted at the School of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science of Technical University of Berlin.

adjustment has not received much attention; and (3) more research has been conducted in a quantitative orientation.

Relative little research on Chinese students. Much research on international students has been conducted in Germany in the last decades; nevertheless, there is relative little research probing Chinese students, the largest international students group in Germany. Although the number of research on Chinese students is increasing, it has been in the last five years that empirical research has begun to shed light on it. Considering the large number of Chinese students in Germany, the research in this area falls behind.

Academic adjustment of Chinese students has not been the focus of the discussion. As far as the topics of research on Chinese students is concerned, so far, little research on adjustment and the concept of intercultural competency has been conducted from a learning perspective (Taylor, 1994). Among the current empirical studies on Chinese students in Germany, although Chinese students' learning experience and learning style (Luo, 2011) at German universities have been discussed, the focus is on adjustment in general (Guan, 2007; Guan, 2010), or Chinese students' social and financial situation (Mao, 2010). Given the pivotal role of academic adjustment, it is significant to investigate the process of their academic adjustment and their learning experience at German universities.

A dominant quantitative orientation. In terms of the research method, except for two papers, most research is conducted in a quantitative perspective: Guan (2010) adopted a biographical research through narrative interviews with three Chinese students and Luo (2011) interpreted the learning styles based on the cultural specificity view between 30 Chinese and local German students. It is worth noting that some research has been carried out in a comparative approach. Both Song (2009) and Luo (2011) adopted a comparative approach to explore cross-cultural adjustment and cultural-related learning styles between German and Chinese students. Song (2009) compared the views of 178 local students (German and Chinese students who study in the host countries) and exchange students (German students in China and Chinese students in Germany).

3.5.2 Conclusion and intended contribution of this thesis

Student identity-specific: academic adjustment

First, Chinese students' academic adjustment has not attracted enough attention in previous research. In the last two decades, scholars have exerted themselves to explore the adjustment of Chinese students abroad on psychological and socio-cultural adjustment (Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006; Wang, 2009; Zhao, 2007; Zheng & Berry, 1991), acculturation (Zheng, Sang, & Wang, 2004), and satisfaction about sociocultural

and educational experience (Zhang & Brunton, 2007); nevertheless, not much research has focused on academic adjustment and learning experience of international students (Kingston and Forland, 2008)¹⁵⁹. Zhou and Todman (2009) pointed out the course of adaptation differed between the study domain and other domains (general and social life). In addition, previous research explores Chinese students' adjustment from ESL-class or pre-university English class perspective (Parris-Kidd & Barnet, 2011). Considering the fact of limited research on nature "study" problems of international students have been conducted (Samuelowicz, 1987), it is necessary to shed light on their "student identity".

Second, the term *academic adjustment* has not been studied thoroughly. Although previous research studies cover a broad spectrum of the topics of international students, much research tends to simply use the term "academic adjustment" as a fact or an indicator, without defining the term and its domain in a scientific manner (Gong & Chang, 2007)¹⁶⁰. Not much research has concretely probed the daily academic life do Chinese students live at German universities, especially their classroom-participation, academic performance, and learning strategy. As the saying goes "When in Rome, do as the Romans do", it is meaningful to explore whether students stick to the learning style acquired in China or whether they abolish the previous learning method and follow the "German way", or they even succeed in finding a third way?

Third, it is paramount to focus on learning experience and academic adjustment of Chinese students in Germany. It is worth nothing that the overall drop-out rate among *Bildungsausländer* on Bachelor's programs in Germany in 2006/2007 was 46%; while the drop-out rate of Chinese students in Germany was 20% (*Wissenschaft Weltoffen 2012*)¹⁶¹. Why Chinese students have lower drop-out rate than their international counterparts¹⁶² in Germany? Chinese students, coming from different academic background, are capable in managing the study in Germany.

Based on this, one important intention of this thesis is to explore the academic adjustment of Chinese students in Germany: How do they understand the learning

¹⁵⁹ Kingston and Forland (2008) inviting East Asian students discussing "their own experiences and understanding of the various educational systems in which they had been involved", and ask them "general views of learning and HE, expectations regarding lecturers, expectations regarding assessment methods, understanding of plagiarism, knowledge of available support, and comparison of previous education to the UK HE system" (p.212-213).

¹⁶⁰ Gong and Chang (2007) used the self-assessment by international students answering question "How well adjusted are you to the instructional methods in the United States?" International students chose from "1-strongly disagree" to "7-strongly agree") to determine their real/objective "academic adjustment". To obtain the information from students perspective is one of the important sources that we get knowledge of their academic adjustment, but how can one simple question like this persuade us that the one-single point stands for the real and complicated situation of students' academic adjustment?

¹⁶¹ The drop-out rate of Master students is not available, as according to "No values could be calculated for students on Master's programs as the statistical prerequisites were not met" (*Wissenschaft Weltoffen 2012*, 2012, p.37). Furthermore, the *Wissenschaft Weltoffen 2012* specified the method for calculating student dropout rates (details see *Wissenschaft Weltoffen 2012*, 2012, p.36).

¹⁶² The drop-out rates amongst *Bildungsausländer* from West Europe was about 72%, Latin America 56%, Africa 48%,

forms (lecturers, seminar, exercises, etc.) and make necessary changes in order to better meet the academic expectation and demand?

Viewing Chinese students as a diverse and heterogeneous individuals

Another intended contribution of this thesis is to view Chinese students as heterogeneous group, not simply as a homogeneous continental or national group (e.g. “Asian students” or “Chinese students”). So far, much research explored the problems of international students as if they were a homogeneous group and neglected the differences among the group of them (Trice, 2003). Asian students, for instance, often share much similarity (Noesjirwan, 1970). A comparison of academic success and failure among six Asian-American ethnic groups (Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, and other Southeast Asians) indicates that Asian ethnic groups have distinctive attribution profiles (Mizokawa & Ryckman, 2003); therefore, instead of generalizing “Asian Americans” patterns in the aggregate, it is crucial to pay specific attention to the unique patterns of each ethnic group.

Similarly, in probing academic adjustment of Chinese students, a large amount of previous research regards Chinese students as a homogeneous group, which neglects the diversity of individual Chinese student, and overgeneralizes and overemphasizes the group (Zhao & Bourne, 2011). Under the term *Chinese learners*, there is an infinite variety difference of temperaments, academic and social backgrounds among them: “individuals, groups, local communities and the geographic, economic, social and cultural diversity” in China (Cortazzi & Jin, 2011, p.314). Based on this, Chinese students’ current learning diversity in Germany (academic disciplines, targeting academic degree, and courses language) is to be probed.

Academic disciplines. Each discipline has its own specific requirement to students. In addition, different disciplines have various requirements to the German language. Danckwortt (1984) pointed out that not much research on international students in Germany has taken the fact of discipline into consideration. An empirical research indicated that Chinese students majoring in natural science (73.3%), humanities (72.7%) and engineering (63.3%) reported the transition of educational system from China to Germany is “difficult or very difficult”; while only 40% of linguistics students express that it is difficult (Guan, 2007). Whether different disciplines present different academic challenges to Chinese students? In order to probe this question, it is essential that Chinese students from various disciplines (natural science, engineering, and social science) are included in the study.

Academic degree. In addition to the academic discipline, different academic level (undergraduate and post-graduate) has different teaching and research expectations on students. For instance, at the undergraduate-level, students are expected to attend lectures and participate in seminars, while at the post-graduate-level, research creativity

is highly valued. Whether Chinese students pursuing bachelor, master, or doctoral degree encounter various difficulties?

Financial resources. Studying abroad requires students affording tuition fee and living expenses, therefore, enough financial support is the prerequisite of a carefree overseas study. Currently, over 90% Chinese students studying in Germany are “free-mover” and supported financially by their parents¹⁶³. Whether those self-funded students who have a part-time job have less time to invest on studies or the financial pressure is a stimulant to finish the study as soon as possible?

Exchange programs. With the frequent academic exchange between China and Germany in the last decades, many exchange programs have been established and a large number of Chinese students have the chance of studying at a German university. With the support provided by program-coordinator, whether exchange students obtain more academic and daily help than free-mover and adjust better than them?

Language of course. A large number of German universities are now offering international master’s degree courses, with English as the teaching language. Since English is the first foreign language to most Chinese students at schools, whether the teaching language will have an influence on the adjustment?

A longitudinal method: following the process

Another intended contribution of this thesis is to understand Chinese students’ academic adjustment in a longitudinal way. Previous research highlights the importance of undertaking more research on international students’ adjustment in a longitudinal method. Church (1982) criticized that “most studies are conducted at a single point in time during the sojourn or retrospectively, with few studies making multiple assessments throughout the sojourn or even before and after the sojourn” (p.561) and he further called attention to the change of adjustment over time. Searle and Ward (1990)’s finding echoed Church’s opinion and agreed that one critical problem hindering the research on culture contact and change was the lack of clarity about how it changes over time. Sam and Berry (2010) emphasized that conducting longitudinal research is the precondition of interpreting the process of cultural and psychological change of acculturation.

On the one hand, relative few studies have included the preparation period into the whole process of adjustment. Volet and Renshaw (1996) pointed out that previous literature “has neglected to examine students’ adjustments to the new education context over a period of time (absence of longitudinal studies)” (p. 206). For instance, over 90%

¹⁶³ According to the Educational Section, Chinese Embassy in Germany, about 90% Chinese are self-funded and 10% are scholarship students. Source: Wang, H. (2010, September 20). 海外留学面面观：中国在德留学生的状况及问题. Guangming Daily (光明日报). Retrieved July 23, 2011 from http://news.xinhuanet.com/edu/2010-09/20/c_12589621.htm (in Chinese).

of the research on international students' experience in Germany is only based on their current stay; yet their pre-departure and re-entry experience can only be achieved through retrospection and preview respectively (Danckwortt, 1984)¹⁶⁴. On the other hand, longitudinal research is crucial to follow international students' development of adjustment, as the initial problems or unsatisfied academic performance of international students doesn't necessarily lead to the conclusion that international students have poor academic competence or unable to manage adjusting to the academic milieu of the host country.

It is worth noting that considering the fact that longitudinal research is often time-consuming, the number of research conducted in a longitudinal manner is still limited. Take the above discussion into consideration, this research intends to explore Chinese students' academic adjustment in a longitudinal manner, which probes Chinese students' motivation, preparation (language proficiency, and knowledge about Germany and German university, intercultural communication experience) and their current learning experience in Germany: the result of the pre-departure and the result after two semesters are to be compared.

Personal growth and educational development: from stress to growth

Most international students are at the age group of 20-30, which is a transitional phase from a young man to an adult. Previous research holds that sojourners experience psychological stress during the process of adjustment. However, Kim (1988) views stress as "a phenomenon naturally occurring in all situations of change to which individuals must adapt" (p.165). International students themselves also admit "at first, it was a riskier and more nerve-racking option to study abroad but argued that rather than hindering them, this risk actually motivated them to work harder" (Kingston & Forland, 2008, p. 216).

Furthermore, it is interesting to compare the opinion of Chinese students current studying at Germany universities and those graduates who finished study in Germany. Since those students pursuing their study in Germany are still in certain stage of their adjustment, to some extent, they cannot provide the whole range of the academic adjustment in Germany. Thus, reflection from Chinese graduates, who finish the study in Germany, is necessary to be taken into consideration. Their academic experience in retrospect will substantially enrich the research on Chinese students studying in Germany in a broader and development perspective. What benefit Chinese graduates most from the learning experience in Germany? How do they reflect on their academic

¹⁶⁴ In addition, in analyzing the results of the longitudinal, international students' language proficiency should be taken into consideration. Church (1982) holds "the meaning of scores on attitude and adjustment measures may change over time partly as a result of increasing language fluency with individuals endorsing or listing more culture shock symptoms as their language proficiency increases" (p.561). Church further suggested that the adequacy of the language level or translation of materials used in the study should be taken into consideration.

adjustment and how do they deal with the difficulty? Based on the literature review, Chinese students currently studying at German universities might report more stress than the graduates; while the latter might report more personal achievement than the former.

Voice of German lecturers and fellow German students: the other side of the story

Moreover, this thesis intends to collect opinions of Chinese students' adjustment from various perspectives. It is worth noting that most research mainly focuses on hearing the story from international students' side and "relatively little is known about faculty members' perceptions of them [international students]" (Trice, 2003, p.379). Danckwortt (1984) suggested academic staff's comment and opinions could be compared with international students' opinion, so as to find out which factors impede and which support international students' adjustment at German universities. Although some research viewing the problems from both lecturers and students' perspective has been carried out in Australia (Samuelowicz, 1987), in the UK (Kingston & Forland, 2008), in Canada (Zhu, 2007), and in the US (Sewell & Davidsen, 1961), more feedbacks and suggestions of international students' adjustment are expected from host perspective.

Danckwortt (1984) raised the question: "who decides, what a successful study is? Whether the student or the university" (p.27)? Although lecturers enjoy a "relative more powerful institutional role" (Henderson, 2009, p.405), Volet (1999b) suggested that study of learning across cultures should be composed of subjective perceptions of both staff and students, so as to obtain a wider perspective that transcends culture-bound norms or principles of good learning. In regard to this, this research aims at giving audience to Chinese students, German lecturers, German students, as well as staff from the international office, in order to obtain an overview of the academic adjustment of Chinese students, as well as their intercultural communication with German students on an academic-based intercultural situation.

Importance of intercultural communication in academic adjustment

Academic adjustment is more than just a learning process, as it happens against an intercultural academic background: Chinese student neither study in a vacuum learning environment nor obtain knowledge through a book-to-brain manner in the library, but on the contrary, they are exposed to an interactive face-to-face intercultural learning environment, which strongly reflects the German academic culture (although the extent of communication also depends mainly on the discipline). In order to survive in the new living and learning milieu, Chinese students, as well as other international students, need to learn the German language, fulfill the academic task, rebuild the set of relational network, and find a new social and cultural identity. So far, some research has discussed the contact between international students and German students (e.g. Heublein, Özkilic, & Sommer, 2007); however, not much research has emphasized the

importance of the intercultural communication to the adjustment of Chinese students. This research intends to explore the relationship between intercultural communication and academic adjustment at an intercultural academic environment.

4. RESEARCH METHOD AND DESIGN

This chapter introduces the research question of the thesis, purposes of the research, research design and procedures, and analysis of the data. Furthermore, reliability and validity, and ethical issues are also to be discussed.

4.1 Research methods, designs and procedures

4.1.1 Research methods

This thesis uses a mixed research method, also known as “triangulations”. *Mixed methods research* is “an approach to inquiry that combines or associates both qualitative and quantitative forms” (Creswell, 2009, p.4). Through using mixed methods (interview and questionnaire), the data of both quantitative and qualitative research are compared, which enhances the validity and reliability of the research. Collecting data from multiple sources enabled the author to triangulate the data. This research is composed of three studies (see Figure 4-1), the reasons are as following:

Study 1	Study 2	Study 3
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Form <i>Interview (cross-sectional)</i>▪ Purpose <i>Obtaining a zoom-out perspective with an overview of adjustment experience of Chinese students (covering different majors, levels of study, and length of stay)</i>▪ Participants <i>18 Chn. Ss</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Form <i>Case study</i>▪ Purpose <i>Through a zoom-in perspective to a faculty: to explore the opinions from both lecturers and Chinese students' voice in an in-depth manner</i>▪ Participants <i>9 (5 Chn.Ss+1 Intl.S+2 Ts)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Form <i>Questionnaire (longitudinal)</i>▪ Purpose <i>A longitudinal perspective to chase the progress of language, and knowledge of German and German universities</i>▪ Participants <i>Phase I: 55(Chn. Ss) Phase II:30 (Chn. Ss)</i>

Figure 4-1: Research methods

Study 1: Information such as initial impressions, learning experience, specific problems they encounter at German universities and the intercultural communication with German students can be best understood through interviews with Chinese students, through asking their personal background before coming to Germany and the diverse

experience in Germany. In order to get an overview and examine personally meaningful information of Chinese students' academic adjustment in Germany, the author conducted interviews with Chinese students who are at different periods of their study in Germany (e.g. at the beginning, middle and end of study) and who major in various subjects (engineering, natural science, and social science) and levels of study (bachelor, master and doctoral study).

Study 2: The majority of previous research on international students only probed the learning experience of international students, while the voices of lecturers in the intercultural learning environment had not been heard very often. Therefore, the author interviewed Chinese students, German lecturers, and one foreign student in the same faculty, so as to know Chinese students' academic adjustment not only from Chinese students' perspective, but also listen to lecturers' opinion and advice.

Study 3: Literature review indicates that adjustment is a long-term and dynamic process: Klein et al. (1971) held that "Any study of the foreign student experience must be longitudinal in scope and make allowance for different phases of adjustment" (p.81). Although Ward, Bochner and Furnham (2006) also emphasized that "The best research is difficult and expensive to undertake because it is done longitudinally and with a good matched control sample of host nationals" (p.143). Because of the "expensive" cost, although many researchers have realized and emphasized the importance of longitudinal research, much previous research only "suggested" instead of "conducted" longitudinal research. The author conducted a longitudinal questionnaire survey, which provides "a quantitative or numeric description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population" (Creswell, 2009, p.145). Questionnaire provides a baseline description of the sample Chinese students' motivation of studying in Germany, expectations, and a range of personal, social and academic challenges that they had experienced in the initial phase of their academic adjustment in Germany. The quantitative analysis was conducted in parallel with the initial qualitative data collection and analysis and helped to inform the design of the latter.

4.1.2 Procedures

This study covers a time space of four years, ranging from September 2008 to August 2012 (see Figure 4-2).

Pilot study (January 2009 – April 2009, and July 2010)

The primary aim of doing a pilot study (in the form of interview and questionnaire) was to explore the learning experience of Chinese students; in addition, pilot interviews also provided the author with the opportunity to identify the pitfalls in interviewing techniques. The sample of the pilot study is made up of three Chinese master students:

two male students and one female one. Two of them majored in engineering and one in social science; they had been in Germany for at least over one year. The pilot informants shared similar characteristics with the interviewees in Study 1. In pilot Study 1, informants are asked open-ended questions (previous learning experience in China, motivation, and preparation of studying abroad) and probed their academic adjustment in Germany. They were encouraged to tell their learning and daily experience freely, as it is significant to cover as many aspects of the students' background, experiences, attitudes, and beliefs as possible (Sewell and Davidsen, 1961). The pilot interview provided much inspiration for designing the frame of interviews for Study 1 and Study 2. Before spreading out the questionnaire for Study 3, the author first did pilot Study 2. These three students were asked again to answer the questions and to provide their opinions about the questionnaire. The three informants, from an insider's perspective, provided suggestions to the improvement of the questionnaire (e.g. choices of answers). In sum, the pilot study was useful, which helped the author to test the research instrument technique.

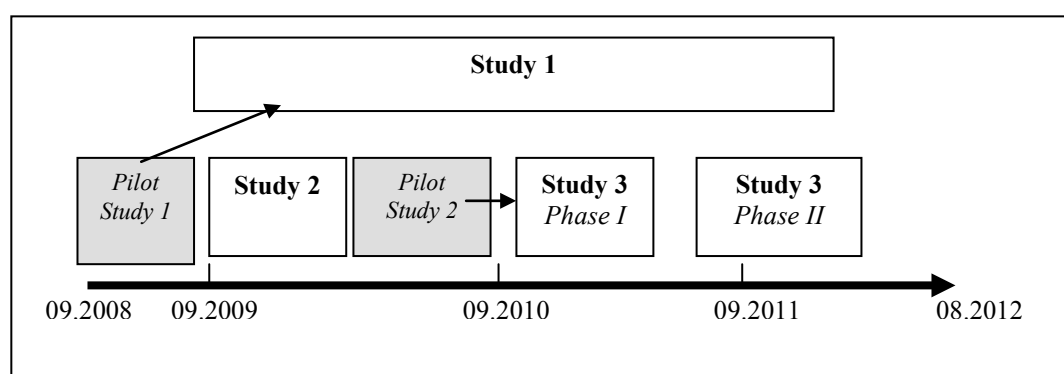


Figure 4-2: Procedure of the research

Study 1: Interviews (April 2009 – February 2012)

Interviews serve as one of the main source of data collection of this study. Chinese students who were currently studying at German universities are the target interviewee group. The interviewees come from various subjects (natural science, social science, and engineering), level of studying (bachelor, master, and doctoral) and are at different phases of study (beginning, middle and end). In addition, factors such as the language of course (German and English), student identity (degree students and exchange), financial support (self-funded and scholarship student), and gender (male and female) are taken into consideration as well.

Selection of the informants. In selecting the participants, factors of their gender (male and female), subjects (social science, natural science, and engineering), intended degree (bachelor, master, and doctoral), student identity (degree and non-degree students), and duration of study in Germany were taken into account. In addition, the author also took the ease of access of interviewees into consideration. For practical and financial reasons,

participants in Study 1 were all students studying in Berlin.¹⁶⁵ Although this study cannot represent all the Chinese students in Germany, the findings of the study will help elucidate how Chinese students' academic adjust to the German universities.

Framework of interview.¹⁶⁶ The interview outline was divided into 5 main sections (in chronological sequence): (i) background information (demographic and educational background), (ii) pre-departure information (language preparation, motivation, preparation, etc.), (iii) academic experience in Germany (initial and general impression/experience; teacher-student and student-student relationship, satisfaction, difficulty, etc.), (iv) intercultural communication on campus, and (v) self-reflection on academic experience (achievement and suggestions to new-coming Chinese students).

Place and time of the interview. Participants are approached personally; before each interview, they were first informed of the purposes of the study and the procedures. In terms of the specific time and place of the interviews, every effort was scheduled according to the interviewees' convenience and preference. In order to minimize the disturbance, interviews were carried out either at researcher or participants' apartment or a separate room for group-discussion at the library. The average length of the interview is one and a half hours.

Recording, transcription and the language of the interview. All interviews were preceded by one or two informal telephones or emails. Interviewees had been informed in advance that the conversation would be recorded. In order to encourage interviewees to talk freely (Legard, Keegan, & Ward, 2003) and capture articulate and developed responses, all interviews were administered in their mother tongue Mandarin, while the result of the analysis was later translated into English. Except for one¹⁶⁷, all interviewees agreed to let the author tape the interview with a digital recorder. The author transcribed verbatim the interviews by herself. Moreover, the author obeyed to the two main principles for transcribing, namely, easy readability and in keeping with standards of research ethics and loyalty towards the interviewees.¹⁶⁸

Study 2: Case Study (July 2010)

Case study is "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (Yin, 2009, p.18). Study 2 focused on Chinese students' academic adjustment at a faculty, aiming at probing the adjustment

¹⁶⁵ The only exception was the graduate sample, who studied at RWTH Aachen University.

¹⁶⁶ The interview outline is included in the Appendix 6.

¹⁶⁷ One interviewee refused to be recorded, but allowed the author to take notes during the interview. After the interview, the author immediately wrote down the conversation based on the notes. The text was then sent to the interviewee by Email and she agreed with the authenticity of the text.

¹⁶⁸ In the meantime, interviewees were encouraged to make suggestions to the interview for any improvement for the further interviews.

from a broader perspective by interviewing both German lecturers and Chinese students. In addition, one international student participated in the case study.¹⁶⁹

Study 3: Longitudinal Questionnaire (September-November 2010; September-November 2011)

Study 3 is composed of two surveys (Phase I + Phase II). In the first survey (Phase I), fifty-five Chinese students (who were about to leave China for Germany or just arrived in Germany) shortly are asked to report their current German or English language proficiency¹⁷⁰, motivation, and knowledge about Germany and German universities. After two semesters in Germany (Phase II), the same group of Chinese students was asked about their current German language proficiency, intercultural contact, and reflection of the learning experience in Germany. Results of phase I and phase II are later compared and reasons for the difference are explored.

4.2 Research purposes

The aims of the research are: First, to explore Chinese students' academic adjustment at German universities. Although some research has conducted with the theme of learning style, (psychological) adjustment, integration, social and financial situation (Guan, 2007; Guan, 2010; Luo, 2011; Mao, 2010), an extensive literature review of Chinese students in Germany indicates little empirical research has been conducted particularly probing their dynamic academic adjustment. Based on this, the purpose of this research is to investigate the process of their academic adjustment at German universities. This study explored the first-hand information of academic adjustment of Chinese students in Germany. Second, this research aims at examining the influence of background, situational, and personal factors on Chinese students' adjustment at German universities. Third, to provide tentative suggestions (to students, to lecturers, and to universities respectively) to help Chinese students better adjust to the German universities.

4.3 Framework of the thesis

Inspired by the theoretical review of adjustment and the landscape of current research on international students, this thesis establishes the framework of academic adjustment

¹⁶⁹ Interviews with Chinese students were conducted in Chinese, while in German with German academic staff. It is necessary to point out that those interviews carried out in German were transcribed to German language by author herself. Two German native speakers helped the author to proofread the German transcription, in order to avoid grammar mistakes.

¹⁷⁰ Chinese students who pursue German-speaking programs are asked to report their German language skill; and those who attend English-speaking programs are required to note their English language skill.

of Chinese students in Germany, transferring from learning in China to learning in Germany (see Figure 4-3).

First, since adjustment is a dynamic process, this research explores the development of Chinese students' academic adjustment in a chronological sequence, namely: pre-departure, initial, developing, and finishing phase. Although the learning experience in Germany (initial, developing, and finishing phase) is the focus, this research attaches great importance to the pre-departure phase as well.

Second, Chinese students' learning experience at German universities is the focus of the thesis. Taking different forms of learning and assessment between Chinese and German universities into consideration, how Chinese students adjust themselves to meet the expectation is to be discussed.

Third, in exploring the learning experience of Chinese students at German universities, "Model of affective, cognitive, and behavioral" (see Figure 2-8) put forwarded by Anderson (1994) is used: when facing difficulty, what do they perceive the problem, how do they feel about it, and what kind of strategies do they adopt to solve it?

Fourth, factors influencing the academic adjustment are to be probed. This research analyzed the factors from a background, situation and personal dimensions.

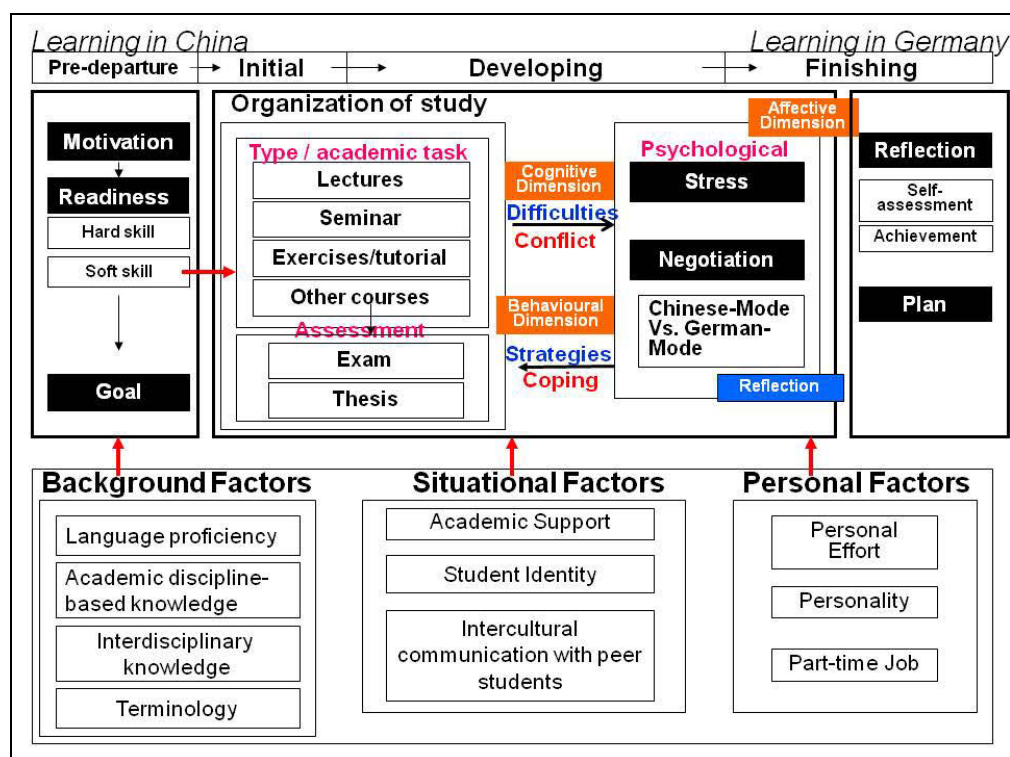


Figure 4-3: Framework of Chinese students' academic adjustment in Germany

4.4 Reliability and validity

4.4.1 Re-interview

In order to increase the reliability and validity, the “Re-interview” (Kvale, 1996) method is used. Kvale (1996) suggested: when finishing analyzing and interpreting the completed interviews, researcher should give the interpretations back to the subjects, so that the subjects “get an opportunity to comment on the interviewer’s interpretations as well as to elaborate on their own original statements” (p.190). Warren and Karner (2010) shared the opinion and held that providing the research subjects with researchers’ interpretation was one approach of external validation to guarantee the validation. Hence, after each interview, the author tried her best to immediately transcribe the interview and sent the transcripts (with my interpretation, field note, and certain questions concerning the specific number, if there was any) to interviewees by email. She asked participants to read through the transcript and check whether there was any misunderstanding in the transcripts. Interviewees later returned Emails, and agreed the authenticity of the interviews. In addition, during the process of analyzing, as long as the author found the meaning of certain text was ambiguous, she immediately contacted the interviewee by sending them an email, with the original text of the transcription and my interpretation. Luckily, all interviewees contacted quickly gave the feedbacks or confirmation, which helped the author to avoid the confusion.

4.4.2 Data triangulation

The mixed method (or data triangulation) adopted in this research helps to increase to establish credibility in qualitative research. The author raised consistent questions in both interview and questionnaire, and later compared the data achieved from the qualitative and quantitative resources. The process facilitates to establish credibility.

4.5 Analysis of the data

Tools

Quantitative data (questionnaire) were analyzed by Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS)¹⁷¹ and qualitative data (interview transcriptions) was processed by MAXQDA¹⁷².

¹⁷¹ SPSS is a software program used for survey authoring and deployment, statistical analysis.

¹⁷² MAXQDA is a software program designed for computer-assisted qualitative data.

Synthesis of data analysis

Considering the fact that this research is composed of three studies, the synthesis of data analysis is important. The quantitative analysis was conducted in parallel with the initial qualitative data collection; such comparison, integration and synthesis of findings of both analyses aimed to increase validity and reliability within the limitation of the study.

4.6 Ethical and moral issues

Before conducting the three studies, the author clearly explained to participants that it was for research purpose, and they would remain anonymous. In terms of the interview, the author informed interviewees that they could refuse to answer any question that they regard as aggressive.

5. FINDINGS

5.1 Profile of participants

Study 1--Interviews: adjustment of Chinese students studying in Germany. Eighteen Chinese students participated in Study 1 (see Table 5-1). Among them, fifteen are current students studying in Berlin, two are prospect students, and one is graduate student.

Table 5-1: Demographic profiles of the participants of Study 1

No.	Code	Sex	Age	Language	Length of time in Germany (Months)	No. of semester	Major	University	Academic degree pursuing in Germany
1	Yin_PhD	M	25	English	1	1	Geography	HU Berlin	PhD
2	Wu_PhD	M	25	English	26	5	Physics	HU Berlin	PhD
3	Sun_PhD***	M	32	German	87	6	Law	HU Berlin	PhD
4	Wang_MA*	M	24	German	1	1	Education	HU Berlin	MA
5	Wan_MA	F	27	German	30	3	Media science	HU Berlin	MA
6	Lee_MA	F	25	German	26	3	Adult Education	HU Berlin	MA
7	Cao_MA	F	26	English	19	3	British studies	HU Berlin	MA
8	Ying_MA**	F	26	German	27	7	Law	HU Berlin	MA
9	Ting_MA	F	26	English	40	7	Economics & Management	HU Berlin	MA
10	Jing_MA	F	24	German	15	3	Theology	HU Berlin	MA
11	Pang_MA	F	25	German	26	4	Electrical Engineering	TU Berlin	MA
12	Zhang_MA	F	24	German	63	6	Sustainable Engineering	TU Berlin	MA
13	Zhou_MA*	M	26	German	24	4	Electrical Engineering	TU Berlin	MA
14	Chen_MA	M	26	German	28	7	Electrical Engineering	TU Berlin	MA
15	Zhao_MA	F	25	German	33	6	Architecture	TU Berlin	MA
16	Prospect student_1	M	24	German	12	/	Automation	--	--
17	Prospect student_2	F	24	German	10	/	Geographic Information System	--	--
18	Fan_Graduate	M	30	German	66	/	Mechanical Engineering	RWTH Aachen	Diplom

*Exchange student

**The participant started a new major at the bachelor level, although she had achieved bachelor degree in China already.

***Participant had first finished his/her first academic degree (bachelor or master) in Germany and was currently doing an advanced academic degree (master or doctoral) in Germany.

Current student studying in Berlin

Among the participants, 44.4% ($n = 8$) were males and 55.6 % ($n = 10$) were females. Subjects ranges in age from 24 to 32 with a mean of 25.6 years. Length of residence in Germany varies from 1 month to 87 months ($M=28.9$). Two are exchange students, and

the remaining participants¹⁷³ are registering full-time courses (bachelor, master or doctoral)¹⁷⁴ at a German university. Their majors cover natural science, engineering, and social science. The participants' gender, age, and disciplines were considered in order to provide maximum diversity. In addition, two students (one doctoral student and one master student respectively) received scholarship.

Prospective students and graduates

Study 1 also includes two prospect Chinese students (who have already achieved bachelor's degree in China) and one graduate (who once studied in Germany and is now working in China).

Study 2: Case study--Faculty of German language and literature studies, University X. A case study was conducted at the faculty of German language and literature studies, University X. University X is a campus-university located in the south of Germany, which was founded in 1970s. The faculty has close academic exchange with Chinese universities, therefore, it has a large percentage of Chinese students. In addition, some professors or lecturers at the faculty have overseas experience themselves in Asia (e.g. China and Korea), North America, and other European countries.

The case study group is composed of eight interviews. **(i) Student group:** Five female Chinese students (four master students and one bachelor student) and one female Georgian student (master student) at the faculty took part in the case study (see Table 5-2). Except for one interview¹⁷⁵, all other interviews were conducted individually. Among them, one Chinese spent one semester as exchange student before. Chinese students in Study 2 are all self-funded students. Unfortunately, no German students volunteered to participate in the research. **(ii) Lecturer group:** Two German lecturers at the faculty, who once studied or worked abroad.

Table 5-2: Demographic profiles of the participants of Study 2

No.	Code	Sex	Age	Language	Length of time in Germany (Months)	No. of semester
19	Qian_MA	F	26	German	10	2
20	Rong_MA	F	25	German	22	2
21	Yang_MA	F	22	German	7	1
22	Jia_MA	F	25	German	10	2
23	Fang_BA*	F	21	German	10	2
24	Georgian student	F	24	German	10	2

*Exchange student

¹⁷³ All Chinese students who participated in the interviews were *Bildungsausländer*.

¹⁷⁴ Exchange students are included as well.

¹⁷⁵ Two interviewees (Jia_MA and Fang_BA) volunteered to participate in the interview together.

Study 3: Longitudinal study. Study 3 was a longitudinal study, composed of two rounds of questionnaires: At the beginning of the first semester, fifty-five Chinese students participated in the Phase I of questionnaire and 31 out of the original 55 participants (with a return rate of 56.4%) later joined the Phase II of questionnaire at the end of the second semester. Of the original sample, 36.4% (n = 20) were males and 63.6 % (n = 35) were females. Subjects ranged in age from 20 to 26 with a mean of 22.5 years (SD =2.0). The participants were composed of two groups: (1) over half of the participants (about 65%) were studying in Germany benefiting from cross-university cooperation between a German university and Chinese universities (Subgroup 1); and (2) 35% of the participants are free-movers (Subgroup 2). Figure 5-1 indicated that over half (56%) were doing master program in Germany. In addition, 69.1% of the participants were self-funded, while 18.2% of them had full-scholarship and 12.7% lived both on a part-scholarship and their parents.

Answering the Phase I of questionnaire, all participants were about to or just registered at a German university: three respondents were just leaving for Germany (ranging from 1 to 5 days before departure) and the rest of them newly arrived in Germany (their average length of residence in Germany is 36.5 days)¹⁷⁶. In answering the Phase II of questionnaire, four Chinese students out of thirty-one participants just returned to China (ranging from 2 to 3 months), and the remaining 27 students were still studying in Germany.

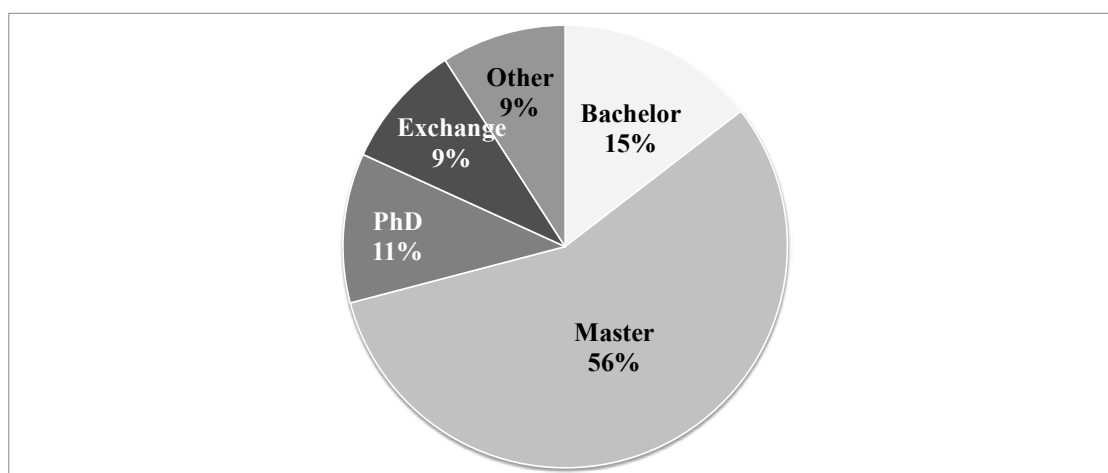


Figure 5-1: Current academic degree pursuing at German universities of Study 3

¹⁷⁶ At the first round of Study 3, all participants had been registered for the first semester (bachelor, master or doctoral level) at German universities. Their length of stay in Germany ranges from 7 days to 365 days. Since some respondents received German language training in Germany they already spent some time (less than one year) in Germany before getting registered.

5.2 Pre-departure phase

The reason why this thesis includes the pre-departure phase, as the academic adjustment starts as early as pre-departure. Although both Du Bois (1956) and Klein et al. (1971) suggested the significance of this phase deserved more detailed study, not many studies have paid substantial attention to this period. In the following text, Chinese students' motivation, application, and readiness of studying in Germany will be discussed in details.

5.2.1 Motivation of studying in Germany

Before exploring the learning experience and academic adjustment of Chinese students in Germany, it is crucial to find out the motivation of studying in Germany, as Klineberg (1980) held that motivation of studying abroad is an important fact influencing the success of the student sojourns. Considering the fact that “[...] the motivations impelling overseas students [...] are complex, diverse, multi-faceted, not always ‘rational’” (Bochner, 1972, p.6), it is necessary to discriminate the difference between (1) motivation of going abroad in general and (2) specific reasons of choosing Germany as a host country.

Going abroad in general: “I have a dream of studying abroad”

First, Chinese students aim at pursuing the knowledge and obtaining an overseas degree. Table 5-3 indicates that in Study 3, “to pursue academic knowledge”, “to improve the foreign (German) language skills” and “to obtain an overseas degree” are three most important reasons for going abroad in general. This result is similar to the recent survey conducted among 1,553 international students in Germany (Isserstedt & Kandulla, 2010), which indicated that international students regarded “to improve German language skills” (70%), “to gain specialist knowledge” (68%) and “for better study conditions” (64%) as the top three motives for coming to Germany.

Table 5-3: Reasons of going abroad in general according to respondents in Study 3 (Multiple choices)

No.	Reasons of going abroad	1 st choice	2 nd choice	3 rd choice	Total
1	To pursue academic knowledge	14	13	4	31
2	To improve the foreign (German) language skills	8	11	12	31
3	To obtain an overseas degree	7	11	6	24
4	Exchange program is available	11	4	3	18
5	To experience the teaching-learning environment abroad	4	3	9	16
6	To obtain better learning environment	4	3	3	10
7	To gain the research experience	2	1	7	10
8	More courses are available at foreign university	0	2	5	7
9	More academic freedom is available	2	3	0	5
10	Others	3	1	1	5
Total		55	52	50	-

Second, Chinese students plan to parlay their qualification through overseas study, in order to become more competitive in the job market. Facing the furious competition in the job market in China, Chinese students expect an overseas study will provide them with a better career chance in the near future (in Chinese 出国镀金 or *chuguo dujin*). Upon graduation, Chinese students begin to plan for the near future. Some bachelor students graduating from a “non-key university” expect to gain a master’s degree from a university with a better reputation (Pang_MA and Wan_MA). They have to first decide whether they would like to continue the study or find a job (see Figure 5-2).

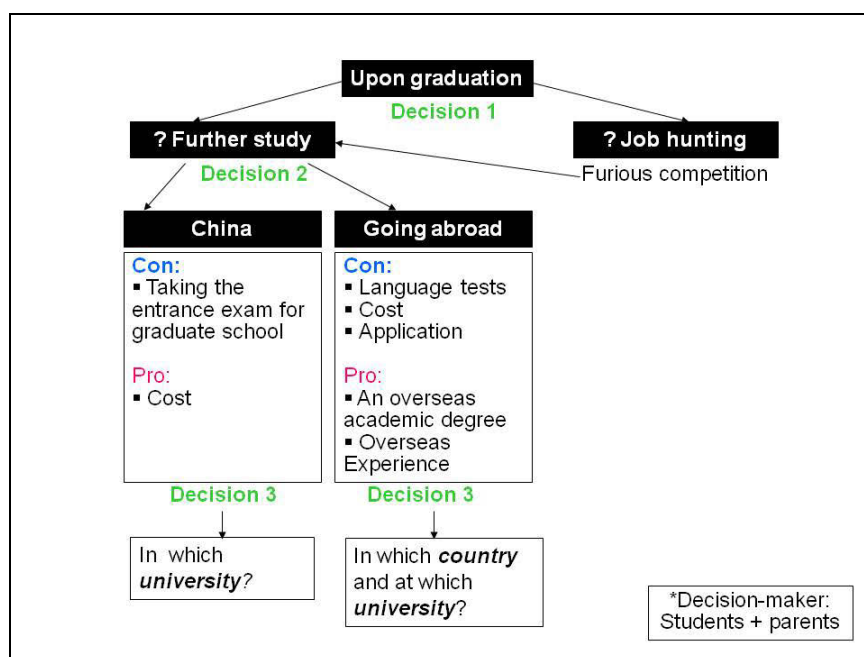


Figure 5-2: Decision making among Chinese students upon graduation¹⁷⁷

Take the decision-making process of bachelor graduates in China as an example. As the “name” or reputation of the university where Chinese students achieved their degree still plays an important role in the job market, students graduated from a *Project 211* or *Project 985* university or a “key university” have some advantages in the furious competition in the job market. In addition, among thousands of bachelor’s degree holders, a master’s degree is often more competitive in the job market. As a result, Chinese graduates expect a master degree will bring a better career chance. By now, they face the second decision: whether they pursue a master degree in China or abroad? The prerequisite for applying for a graduate study is: applicants have to take an entrance exam for post graduate school (in Chinese 考研 or *kaoyan*), which is very competitive. Take the entrance exam for post graduate school in China between 2001 and 2011 as an example, the latest number of applicants, who took the exam for post graduate school in 2012, was over 1.65 million (see Figure 5-3).¹⁷⁸ The ardent competition for applying for

¹⁷⁷ Often, such decision is made together by parents and students.

¹⁷⁸ Retrieved February 24, 2012, from <http://www.chinanews.com/edu/2012/01-07/3587462.shtml> (in Chinese)

a place for studying at the post graduate schools often makes Chinese students turn abroad for further study. Furthermore, one interviewee (Ting_MA) mentioned that, to some extent, applying for a master' study abroad is “easier” than in China, since one can apply to as many universities as possible abroad, but one can apply to only one university if one participates in the entrance exam for post graduate school in China. It is worth noting that in making the decision of studying abroad, the parents of Chinese students play a very important role (Bodycott & Lai, 2012). For instance, two interviewees (Ting_MA, Pang_MA, and Zhang_MA) mentioned that their parents or relatives had had some impact on their decisions of studying abroad.

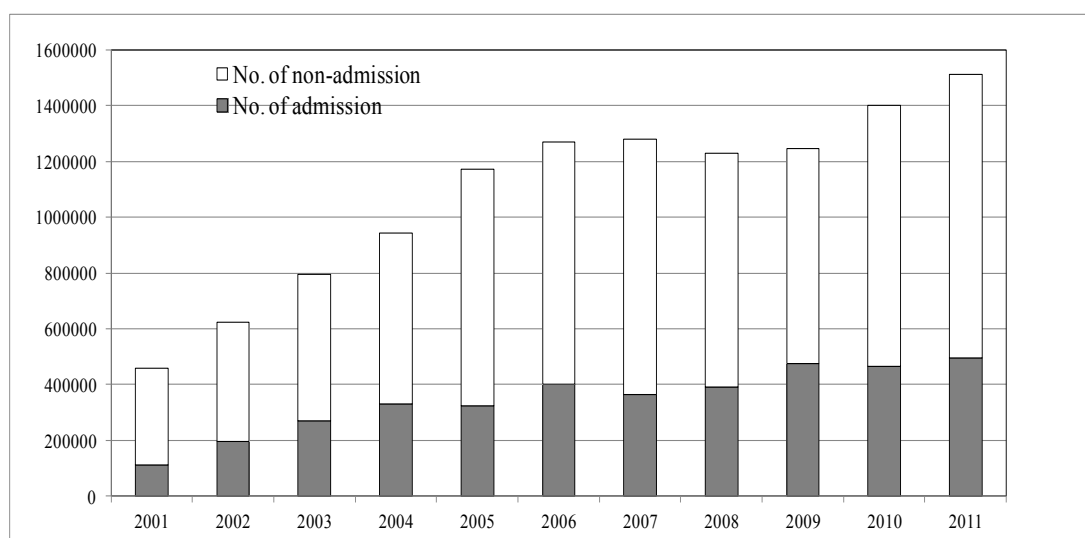


Figure 5-3: Number of applicants and admission of entrance exam for post graduate school in China (2001-2011)¹⁷⁹

Third, some Chinese students have “a dream of going/studying abroad” (in Chinese 出国/留学梦 *chuguo meng/ liuxue meng*). In German language, the words *Wanderlust* (crave for travel) or *Fernweh* (an ache for the distance) vividly describe one’s passion and enthusiasm for travelling. Similarly, Chinese phrases “出国热” (the craze for going abroad) and “留学梦” (the dream of studying abroad) also interpret the strong desire for Chinese to study abroad. Klineberg (1980) stated that “with the rarest of exceptions, they [overseas students] all go willingly, and in many cases enthusiastically” (p.273). Chinese students, as many students in every corner of the world, have a dream of going abroad. Some respondents started the dream as early as in the first year at the university (e.g. Cao_MA and Zhou_MA), who are longing for “having a look at the outside world and don’t have specific target group” (in Chinese); others began to make plan at the third or fourth year (Ting_MA) or even later after having a job (Lee_MA).

¹⁷⁹ Retrieved February 24, 2012, from <http://edu.sina.com.cn/kaoyan/2012kybd/> (in Chinese)

Specific motivation of studying in Germany

In the literature review on the policy of internationalization of higher education in Germany, we have discussed its strength and weakness in the market of international education (Chapter 1). Like many international students, Chinese students notice such opportunity as well, and choose Germany because of its excellent academic reputation, affordable tuition and life expenses, and relative “easy” application requirement. This result is similar to that of a study conducted with over 6,000 prospective, current and recently-graduated international students, which indicate affordable cost (37.3%), employment prospects (34.0%) and international recognition of the degree (24.9%) are the three most important factors of choosing a country (Lawrence, 2009).¹⁸⁰

First, for German universities’ good academic reputation. Germany enjoys a good reputation for classical engineering sciences (e.g. Mechanical Engineering, Automobile Technology, Computational Engineering Sciences, etc.). Both qualitative (Study 1 and Study 2) and quantitative (Study 3) results indicated the good reputation of German universities is one of the most important reasons that attracts them to Germany. For example, 35 out of 55 respondents in Study 3 agreed that the good reputation of German university is attractive (see Table 5-4).

Table 5-4: Reasons of studying in Germany according to respondents in Study 3 (Multiple choices)

Reasons of choosing Germany	1 st choice	2 nd choice	3 rd choice	Total
German universities have good reputation	15	15	5	35
Low/none tuition fee	4	11	12	27
A cooperation program is available	19	3	3	25
Good career chance in the future	3	6	7	16
Germany is an industrialized country	1	7	7	15
The specific major enjoys good reputation	7	4	3	14
Be interested in German culture and history	2	2	7	11
Going abroad to change the current situation	1	2	2	5
Some friends studying in Germany	1	2	1	4
Part-time job is allowed	0	1	1	2
Other reason	2	0	0	2
<i>Total</i>	55	53	48	-

Note: Respondents are allowed to give more than one choice.

The result of the interviews is consistent with that of the questionnaire. Chinese students in the interviews also clearly showed their admiration for specific subjects at German universities, for example, Mechanical Engineering (mentioned by Fan_Graduate) and Electrical Engineering (mentioned by Chen_MA). In addition, two

¹⁸⁰ This result is based on an on-line survey. Among 6,172 feedbacks, 2,716 returns came from prospective students, 2,352 from students who studying in Australia, 373 students studying in another country, and 731 graduated students from Australia.

doctoral students also received admission letters from the US and the UK, but they finally chose Germany also for its good research reputation.

At the doctoral level, it is more important to follow an excellent supervisor, who is the guru in my field. The target country or university to me is less important. (Yin_PhD, 18-19)

In the research of natural science, especially in the field of physics, the German researchers have done substantial contribution in the last 200 years, for example, Einstein and Max Planck. There must be something worth learning from its research system and research attitude. (Wu_PhD, 10-11)

In addition, interviewees also indicated that they come to Germany aiming at achieving real knowledge, not just for an overseas degree.

Many of Chinese students studying in Germany come from a middle- or working-class family in China: frankly, their parents do want to send their children abroad for learning the true knowledge, instead just for an overseas degree. If one just aims at achieving an overseas degree, one would probably choose the UK or other English-speaking country. (Chen_MA, 73-73)

Second, for affordable tuition and living cost. An affordable tuition and living cost is another important reason that attracts Chinese students to choose Germany. Previous survey indicated that about two-thirds of Chinese students chose to study in Germany, as German universities didn't charge tuition fee (Zhou, 2010). Table 5-4 indicates that no/low tuition fee becomes the second important reason that Chinese students study in Germany. In the interviews, Chinese students (Pang_MA, Sun_PhD, Cao_MA, Jing_MA and Chen_MA) emphasized that the low tuition fee and life expenses was one big motivation, which provide Chinese students from working class with an opportunity to realize their "dreams of studying overseas".

An overseas study for many Chinese families is luxurious, as their (families') current financial ability cannot afford the "dream of going abroad". First, the tuition fee and living expenses is cheaper in Germany than in other countries. Take the US and the UK as an example: in the US, according to the survey conducted by The College Board, public four-year colleges averagely charge \$8,244 (about 6,509 Euro) in tuition and fees for in-state students and \$12,526 for full-time out-of-state students (about 9,890 Euro) in 2011-12¹⁸¹. In the UK, the tuition fee becomes a big burden to home students as well.¹⁸² In China, a bachelor student pays 5,000-10,000 RMB (about 624-750 Euro)

¹⁸¹Retrieved February 25, 2012, from The College Board <http://www.collegeboard.com/student/pay/add-it-up/4494.html>

¹⁸² Source: retrieved from BBC <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-17067132> on February 26, 2012

annually.¹⁸³ Second, not many families can afford the overseas study for their children. The National Bureau of Statistics of China reported that, the annual disposable income in 2010 in the city is 21,810 RMB (about 2,726 Euro), while the net annual income in the rural area is 5,919 RMB (about 774 Euro)¹⁸⁴. Given the relative low income, many families in China have great difficulty in affording their children to study abroad. Based on these two reasons, to Chinese students, studying in Germany is more affordable or realistic than studying in other countries. Moreover, international students are allowed to work 90 whole days, or 180 half days in Germany.¹⁸⁵

Third, to improve German language proficiency. (i) to German majors/ minors. Those interviewees who majored in German language and literature studies in China would first consider Germany as (the only) destination, which they regarded as a natural and logical choice (in Chinese 顺理成章 or *shunlichengzhang*). Those Chinese students who once majored in German language and literature studies in China have aspiration to come to Germany to enhance German language proficiency and deepen the knowledge and understanding of German culture (Qian_MA and Jia_MA). (ii) Others are motivated to learn German language as a new foreign language (Lee_MA, Wu_PhD and Zhou_MA). Currently, German, as well as French, Spanish, is regarded as “minority foreign language” in China. In addition to English, Chinese students hope to pick up another foreign language.

Forth, for relative “easy” application requirement (in Chinese 门槛低 or *menkan di*). Lee (1966), based on the theory of migration, put forward the factors that encourage and repel the migration; Mazzarol et al. (2001) later put forward the “Push-Pull” factors that influence overseas study: “Push factors are those operating within the source countries that serve to initiate the student's decision to undertake international study” (p.3); while “Pull factors are those that operate within the host country and make that country relatively attractive to international students” (p.3). Although a large number of participants in the interviews had regarded the US as their first choice, Germany finally turned out to be their destination. In addition to the high cost of studying in the US, the demanding entry requirement is another reason making Chinese students change their destination. Several interviewees mentioned that universities in the US have “门槛高” (literally translation: high doorsill of the admission, meaning high demanding admission). The word “GRE” (Graduate Record Examinations) is mentioned by every interviewee who had once expected to study in the US. Because of this, interviewees (Yin_PhD, Fan_Graduate, Cao_MA, and Zhou_MA) finally made the decision of studying in Germany (see Table 5-5). In addition, one interviewee (Pang_MA, 50-55)

¹⁸³ In 2007, universities administrated by the Ministry of Education of China were allowed to charge students 5,000-10,000 RMB annually. In China, university students study regular subjects pay 5,000 RMB/year, while students majoring in the fine art pay about 10,000 RMB/year. Retrieved June 30, 2012, from People's Daily Online <http://edu.people.com.cn/GB/5959342.html> (in Chinese)

¹⁸⁴ Retrieved July 1, 2012, from National Bureau of Statistics of China http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjgb/ndtjgb/qgndtjgb/t20120222_402786440.htm (in Chinese)

¹⁸⁵ Retrieved February 26, 2012, from *Deutsches Studentenwerk* http://www.internationale-studierende.de/fragen_zur_vorbereitung/finanzierung/jobben/ (in German)

mentioned her home university in China was not that “famous” and she would not have the opportunity to be admitted to any “good” university in the US.¹⁸⁶

In addition, German universities offer a large choice of courses at master degree in English. According to DAAD¹⁸⁷, there are currently about 1,000 international programs are available to international students: 100 Bachelor programs, 586 Master programs, and 286 Doctoral programs respectively, including various disciplines.

Table 5-5: Push and pull factors students study in China, the US and Germany

Push factors		Pull factors	
China		Abroad	
		US	Germany
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Current job market requires competitive graduates (Degree + reputation) ▪ Dissatisfaction with the education in China 	➔	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Having a good academic and research reputation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Having a good academic and research reputation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A competitive entrance exams for postgraduate schools in China 	➔	Pros <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ English-speaking countries* Cons: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ High tuition fee/ high living expense ▪ GRE 	Cons <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ≥1 year for German learning** Pros: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No/ little tuition fee ▪ No entrance exams

* English is the first foreign language to most Chinese students

** Although a large number of international master programs are also available

*** The symbol “➔” indicates the result of “push”; the symbol “↔” implies the “push and pull”; and “=” indicates the equal pull factors of the US and Germany.

Fifth, for other reasons. (i) Some students received recommendations/wishes of studying in Germany or influenced by friends or relatives. Zhou (2010) found that about 1/5 respondents chose Germany, because it was their parents’ decision (p.102). Two Participants in Study 1 indicated that their parents wished to do so or made the decision. In addition, parents of two interviewees (Pang_MA and Jing_MA) have once been to Germany, and their positive experience also stimulates them to recommend/ encourage their children. Similarly, in Study 3, 65.5% of participants reported that someone in their family, circles of friends had once visited, worked or studied in Germany. (ii) Some Chinese students indicated that German culture, history, and art (mentioned by Ying_MA) or philosopher (Cao_MA mentioned Nietzsche) are important reasons attracting them. (iii) Boyfriend or girlfriend is applying to German universities. Some Chinese students chose to study in Germany, as their boyfriend (Wan_MA) or girlfriend (Fan_Graduate) had made the decision to study in Germany.

¹⁸⁶ Furthermore, previous research found that the principal motivation of studying abroad for Chinese students was exactly based on two reasons: (1) the push factor: limited opportunities or insufficient/ even not existed facilities in home countries; (2) the pull factor: to achieve the academic degree at a prestigious university in an industrialized country, which may bring promising future (Chan & Drover, 1997; Leong, 1972). These two factors partly interpret the motivation of Chinese students.

¹⁸⁷ International programs in Germany 2011, Retrieved June 20, 2011, from <http://www.daad.de/deutschland/studienangebote/international-programmes/07535.en.html>

In conclusion, it is important to point out that the final decision of studying in Germany among Chinese students is not simply based on one simple reason; instead, it is a combination of some motivations that finally stimulates Chinese students making the decision of studying in Germany. A survey similarly found that academic ability, social and cultural experience, economic return, and competitive ability in the employment market are the motivations that attract mainland Chinese students (Li & Bray, 2006). The motivation is a compromise of dream and reality, as Chirkov et al. (2007) addressed the goals of international students “are not their life-guiding principles but more specific situational objectives that are shaped by their situation in the home country, relationships with families, future career goals and other conditions” (p.204-205). Some aim at achieving academic knowledge, while others, filled with passion, desire and curiosity of going abroad to experience different learning environment and to expand their horizons, didn’t have a specific or concrete goal of study abroad.

5.2.2 Application

The process and channel of application, the strategies that Chinese students used, and how they made the decision of selecting the university are to be discussed in this part.

Process of application

Background. Unlike German students, *Bildungsinländer*, or international students from other EU countries (who legally enjoy the same rights as German citizens), Chinese students can not directly be enrolled in a German university, as they have to first obtain the permission of studying in Germany. The application and the certificate of access to higher education of foreign students will be strictly proved (Heublein, Sommer, & Weitz, 2004, p.18). Take Humboldt-Universität of Berlin as an example, at the first-degree level, namely, bachelor, *Diplom* or *Staatsexamen* (National-Exam), about 5% of the university places are available to international students.¹⁸⁸ Because of the nationwide *numerus clausus* (NC), competition is furious among German students; some of them have to wait for several semesters for their desired discipline.¹⁸⁹

In applying, Chinese students have to fulfill two conditions in order to achieve the admission to get registered for the undergraduate study: proof of sufficient German

¹⁸⁸ According to DAAD, “A nationwide numerus clausus (NC) applies to those subjects for which there are more applicants in Germany than the university system can absorb”. Retrieved October 25, 2011, from <http://www.daad.de/deutschland/wege-durchs-studium/zulassung/06163.en.html>

¹⁸⁹ Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. *Informationen für ausländische Studierende* (p.1–9). Retrieved January 2, 2012, from <http://studium.hu-berlin.de/bewerbung/formulare/dt-assist.pdf/download>

proficiency¹⁹⁰ and the equivalence of the native with a German university entrance qualification – APS¹⁹¹ (Heublein, Sommer, & Weitz, 2004, p.19).¹⁹²

Channels of application. Except for one students (Pang_MA) and the two prospective students applying to the German universities through *agents for study abroad* (in Chinese 留学中介 or *liuxue zhongjie*), all interviewees managed the application by themselves.

Duration of the application. The duration of the application varies. If one misses the deadline of one registration (e.g. registration for German test, APS, etc.), the duration of the whole application for him will be extended. Actually, one interviewee (Lee_MA) mentioned that many Chinese students gave up their “German Dream” on the way of the application, as it took too much time. Although none of the participants particularly pointed out the difficulty of application, two Chinese students experienced a zigzag path for the application, before they were finally admitted. One Chinese student (Jing_MA) could not receive her result of APS in time and missed the deadline of applying to the university for the first time, which made her wait for one year for the next application. Another Chinese (Pang_MA) student failed to get registered at the university for the first time, as she didn’t have the visa required by the university and waited for one semester for the next application.¹⁹³ It is important to mention that if one applies to an English international master program or attends an exchange programs, the process of the application is easier (mentioned by Zhou_MA and Wang_MA).¹⁹⁴

Strategies of applying and selecting the university

In order to increase the chances of being admitted to the German universities, it is understandable that Chinese students apply to a few universities. Chinese students applied to a few universities. With very few exceptions, the number of universities that interviewees applied to ranges from five (Ting_MA) to nine (Fan_Graduate). When

¹⁹⁰ To students who apply for an international (English) program they need to prove their English language proficiency. Some universities, at undergraduate’s level, only offer courses in German (e.g., Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin), while some universities of applied science offer courses in English at bachelor’s level as well.

¹⁹¹ APS is the abbreviation of *Akademische Prüfstelle* (in English: Academic Evaluation Centre). APS provides services on behalf of the Cultural Section of the German Embassy, which is the gateway to study in Germany for Chinese university applicants. APS attests the authenticity of the document and holds a validation interview or a Test for Academic Studies with the applicants. In applying for studying at a German university, Chinese students have to submit their documents and qualifications which they obtain in China to the APS. Those Chinese students who successfully go through the process will receive a certificate issued by APS, which is entry requirement for Chinese students in applying German universities. Retrieved January 2, 2012, from <https://www.aps.org.cn/web/>

¹⁹² It is worth mentioning not every international student (e.g. doctoral student) has to show the result of APS.

¹⁹³ Normally, one international student will only get registered, if he holds the admission letter and a visa which clearly states that he is admitted to this specific university. The interviewee (Pang_MA) failed to get registered at TU Berlin for the first time, as her visa was provided under the precondition of the admission to another university.

¹⁹⁴ In terms of the application, exchange students might enjoy some privilege, as the coordinator of the cooperative program helps them to deal with the procedures.

they finally received the admission letter, they made the decision by comparing the location of the city, as well as other reasons.

First, in selecting the university, the program or major is the most important factor for Chinese students. To those who chose to study in Germany for academic reasons, they set high value on majors in choosing the universities. For example, one interviewee received 9 letters of admission, but he finally chose RWTH, as “RWTH is very strong in mechanical engineering” (Fan_Graduate, 13-13). Similarly, several interviewees shared the attitude “I want to study this subject” (e.g. Zhao_MA for architecture; Yang_MA and Rong_MA for German language and literature) in Germany. For these students, the location of the university is not the priority.¹⁹⁵

Second, Chinese students show much concern to the “fame” of the university. In Germany, although there are some university-rankings¹⁹⁶ are available, higher education institutions are not categorized as “key-university” or “non-key-university”¹⁹⁷; while in China, the prestige of the university still plays an important role. In choosing the universities, Chinese students and their parents preferred to “famous” or “well-known” German university to a “nameless” or “unknown” one. For example, one interviewee (Ting_MA) mentioned that her relatives had strongly recommended her to study at the Humboldt-Universität for its “name” and its Nobel-prize winners.

Third, some students take the location of the university into consideration. (i) Chinese students hold that big cities provide better chances (Cao_MA and Sun_PhD), therefore, they prefer to study in big cities. For instance, one interviewee (Lee_MA) applied all three comprehensive universities in Berlin. (ii) The cost of living is another big consideration, as the majority Chinese students are self-funded students. Berlin, because of the historical reason, is much cheaper than other German cities (especially those located in southern Germany). For example, one law student (Ying_MA) received the letter of admission from University of LMU Munich as well, but considering the relative high living expenses in Munich, she chose Berlin. In addition, currently, universities in Berlin do not charge tuition fee. (iv) Nevertheless, it is interesting to mention that not all Chinese students aim at studying in big German cities. For instance, some Chinese students in Study 2 had chosen the University X, with the special intention of avoiding meeting too many Chinese students.

¹⁹⁵ In addition, to doctoral students contacted the supervisor in Germany, as they noticed German supervisors’ research interest by finding their in the journal article (Yin_PhD) or browsing the job vacancy posted on the homepage of the institute (Wu_PhD).

¹⁹⁶ For instance, CHE Ranking, DFG Funding Ranking, and Humboldt-Ranking are some national university rankings in Germany.

¹⁹⁷ Germany launched the *Excellence Initiative* (in German: *Exzellenzinitiative*) in 2005/2006, aiming at promoting its top-level research. Although some universities have been given the title of “elite universities” or won the research funding for their graduate schools and research cluster, German university are regarded as equal.

One interviewee mentioned that “This city is really unknown in Germany, not to mention the university. I had expected that there should have been fewer Chinese students here” (Rong_MA, 48-48).¹⁹⁸

5.2.3 Readiness for the study in Germany: hard skill and soft skill

In terms of the readiness for overseas study, one might immediately refer to the language preparation. However, in addition to the German language training, there are other indispensable preparations for the future study abroad. For instance, Taft (1981) proposed four predispositions that a person must possess competencies that relevant to each culture: (1) knowledge about the society, (2) communication skills, (3) technical skills, and (4) social skills. Based on this, their pre-departure readiness will be viewed from a “hard skill” and “soft skill” perspective. The former focuses on their previous academic and foreign language background, while the latter refers to Chinese students’ knowledge about Germany and German universities, previous intercultural experience, and psychological readiness. Compared with the hard skill such as foreign language competence, their soft skill has not attracted enough attention; therefore, this part probes both hard and soft skill of their departure readiness.

Hard skill 1: Academic readiness -- transition of major and degree

Are Chinese students ready for the academic challenge? “Hard skill” in this research refers to the academic and language readiness of Chinese students. Participants’ academic and language background will be discussed.

Academic background. In terms of academic background, the author separated types of academic background of Chinese students in Germany into three categories, namely, the “*graduates*”¹⁹⁹ (students who already received one academic degree in China), the “*adventurer*” (students who haven’t achieved any academic degree in China), and the “*exchange student*” (students who are doing exchange program in Germany). Table 5-6 indicated the academic degree that participants in three studies have achieved in China respectively.

(i) The “*graduates*”: to pursue a further degree in Germany. The graduates are those students who already achieved an academic degree in China, i.e. bachelor or master degree. Since the introduction of Bachelor-Master-Doctoral system in Germany, Chinese students holding bachelor degrees in China can directly apply for a master

¹⁹⁸ Taking their major (German language and literature) into consideration, it is not difficult to understand why it is important to them to study in an environment where they have more opportunities to speak German language.

¹⁹⁹ Here, the academic background of “graduates” refers those Chinese students who have achieved at least one academic title such as bachelor or master degree.

study in Germany after graduation.²⁰⁰ To this group of Chinese students, studying in Germany is a low-risk decision: in case they failed to manage the study in Germany, they “have at least one academic title in China” (mentioned by Jia_MA, 22-22). Based on the result of Table 5-6, most participants belong to this low-risk group. (ii) The “*adventurer*”: to quit the study in China and to pursue a bachelor degree in Germany. In Study 1, two respondents (Zhang_MA and Zhao_MA), at the time of applying a German university, were still doing their bachelor degree; therefore, the decision of studying in Germany means they had to first quit their previous bachelor course in China. To some extent, this is a risky decision: they “burned the boat” and didn’t have the “route of retreat” (in Chinese 断后路 or *duan houlu*). To this group of Chinese students the decision is highly risky and the only way to success is to manage the study (e.g. a bachelor degree) in Germany. What motivates those Chinese students to make such risky decision? One interviewee (Zhang_MA) was not satisfied with the reputation of her home university, as she didn’t succeed in obtaining a good mark in the national college entrance exam (in Chinese 高考 or *gaokao*); and the other was not satisfied with her major, although she was admitted in Tongji University, a prestigious university located in Shanghai. (iii) The *exchange students*: Three participants in this research were exchange students. In interviews, one bachelor student (Fang_BA) was doing one semester and one master-student (Wang_MA) spent two semesters respectively; the third student (Zhou_MA) was doing a double-degree.²⁰¹

Table 5-6: Academic degree achieved in China of participants in all three studies

	Frequency (%)		
	Study 1	Study 2	Study 3
Undergraduate	2 (10.0)	0 (0.0)	19 (34.5)
Bachelor	13 (65.0)	4 (80.0)	24 (43.6)
Post graduate	3 (15.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (1.8)
Master	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	6 (10.9)
Doctoral student	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3 (5.5)
Others (exchange program)	2 (10.0)	1 (20.0)	2 (3.6)
Total	20(100.0)	5 (100.0)	55(100.0)

The consistence of major. All Chinese respondents had the experience of studying at Chinese universities, they had had specific majors before they came to Germany. Table 5-7 indicated the consistence of Chinese students’ majors in China and Germany respectively. Participants were required to judge the consistence of their majors themselves. The “inconsistent” major means Chinese students’ current major in Germany is unrelated to their previous academic background / knowledge in China; “(almost) consistent” indicates that their current and previous major is exactly the same

²⁰⁰ Except for five interviewees in Study 1 and 2, other participants didn’t have working experience. Most of them are fresh graduates (in Chinese 应届毕业生 or *yingjie biyesheng*).

²⁰¹ He attended a double-degree program cooperated between Technical University of Berlin and his home university.

or similar; and “relevant” major shows the relation between the previous and current major is relevant.

Table 5-7: Consistence of previous major in China and current major in Germany

	Inconsistent	Relevant	(Almost) consistent	No. of participants
Study 1	28.6 %	14.3 %	57.1 %	14*
Study 2	0.0 %	0.0 %	100 %	5
Study 3	23.6 %	47.3 %	29.1%	55

Note: *among eighteen Chinese students in Study 1, the results of two prospect students and two students who started their first degree in Germany are not included.

Often, a relevant or the same major in the previous study in China provides Chinese students with basic academic knowledge, which, to some extent, facilitates a smooth transition to the study in Germany. For instance, one doctoral student (Yin_PhD) reported that since his current major is almost identical with what he was doing in China, it was easy for him to handle with the challenge in the new learning environment. In the meantime, over one-fourth of participants changed their major in Germany (28.6% in Study 1 and 23.6% in Study 3)²⁰², and the rest either studied in the identical or relevant academic fields in Germany.²⁰³ The difference of classification of academic fields between Germany and China partly explains why over one-fourth participants changed their majors: it is not easy to study in the same field as before.²⁰⁴ In addition, some participants changed the major as they had little interest in their previous major.

Hard skill 2: German language

How long have Chinese students learned German language before arriving in Germany? Whether attending the standard language test (*TestDaF*²⁰⁵ or *DSH*²⁰⁶) helps them for the further study at German universities? How do they judge their own language skills? This part will explore Chinese students’ German language background, language training, and academic and daily German language level.

German language background. This research separated Chinese students’ German language background into four categories: *German majors*, *Rushers*, *Dumb German-learners*, and *Zero-German-speakers*.

(i) The *German-majors* are those Chinese students who majored in German studies in China. Two students (Wang_MA and Jing_MA) in Study 1 and all five Chinese

²⁰² The field in Study 2 requires participants’ previous German study’s background, therefore, their previous major is “consistent” with the current one.

²⁰³ A majority of faculty at German universities require students applying for a master study to have the same or relevant academic background at bachelor’s study. Participants in this research who switched to a new major in Germany currently majored in subjects in the field of social science.

²⁰⁴ For example, one interviewee (Wan_MA) majored in “Advertising” (in Chinese 广告学 or *guanggaoxue*) in China, while she was majoring “Media Studies”, a relevant major, in Germany.

²⁰⁵ TestDaf (*Der Test Deutsch als Fremdsprache*) is an International German language test to those foreign students who would like to study at German universities.

²⁰⁶ DSH (*Deutsche Sprachprüfung für den Hochschulzugang*) is a language proficiency test required to study at German higher education institutions.

participants in Study 2 belong to this category. In addition, three students in Study 1 attended German courses for several semesters at their bachelor's study. This category of Chinese students received professional German language training, and had experience of contacting the German cultures or German people.

(ii) The *Rushers* are Chinese students who learn the German language in an “urgent” manner. They rushed to learn the German language in order to pass the standard German test, as the German language is the requirement of the applying to German university. In preparing for the German language tests, they either attended an intensive German course in China or in Germany. Compared with the *German majors*, this group of students has less knowledge of the German language or German culture. Although they passed the minimum German language required by German universities, their knowledge of Germany and German culture is little. The result of the interviews indicates that *Rushers* actually accounts for the majority of Chinese students in Germany.

(iii) The *Dumb German learners* are those who have some limited German language, for instance, two interviewees (e.g. Ting_MA and Cao_MA) who had minored in German language in China. Although they had some basic German grammar and vocabulary, they were not confident of their German language skills at all. As the regarded their current German language course they attended is not communicative-oriented, some informants language as “dumb German” (in Chinese 哑巴德语 or *yaba deyu*). Different from the *Rushers*, the *dumb learners* registered in international master programs.

(iv) The *Zero-German-speakers* are those Chinese students who have none German language proficiency at all. Only two PhD students (Wu_PhD and Yin_PhD) in Study 1 hadn't learned any German language before arrival. Since the working language at the lab is English, the German proficiency for them is not required.²⁰⁷ They were *zero-German-speakers* and they optimistically expected that this should not be “no big problems” for them, as they had been informed that their German colleagues speak good English.

Language training. Interviewees received the German language training in China and/or in Germany. The following text described their experience of language training in China and Germany respectively.

In terms of the German language training in China, five out of 18 interviewees in Study 1 received language training and later passed the standard German test in China. The rest of them attended further training and passed German language test in Germany. Except for two interviewees (Sun_PhD and Lee_MA), most of the Chinese students

²⁰⁷ International students who are enrolled in an English-language international program or doctoral applicants who write their theses in English are not necessarily required to prove their German language proficiency. Accordingly, their English level is required.

were not satisfied with the German course in China, as they mentioned that they didn't have many chances of practicing the oral German language (Ying_MA) or reported the quality of teaching is not so satisfying (Zhao_MA, Wan_MA and Zhang_MA). In addition, in reality, since most participants were full-time students in China, they were only able to afford the time of attending German courses alongside their "normal" academic courses at the university. It is significant to point out that the majority of respondents in Study 1 and Study 2 later strongly suggested other Chinese students who plan to study in Germany in the future should first learn German language well in China.

Concerning the German language training in Germany, many Chinese students decided to attend the language course and examination in Germany. Some Chinese students (e.g. Wan_MA) believed that the ineffective German language learning in China was "waste of time" (in Chinese 耗时间 or *hao shijian*), as they regarded the German language training in German was authentic and held the attitude "to learn the German language in Germany is better"²⁰⁸. Such "hope" is identical with the Chinese students studying in New Zealand, who originally planned to spend as little time as possible (Zhang & Brunton, 2007, p.141). Nevertheless, the level of German language training in Germany also varies. Here are two examples. The first is about one Media-major, who was longing for passing the language test in Germany as soon as possible.²⁰⁹

After attending some German courses²¹⁰, I just didn't want to "waste" any time in learning German in China. In arriving in Germany, I started learning German in the private school (Hartnackschule) in Berlin. [...] After six months, I went to the "famous" theological college in Bonn. [Interviewer: why is it famous?], because this college is well known for its high passing rate of the German language test. [...] 50% students attending the courses were Korean and 45% were Chinese. [...] During the language exam, some of the German vocabulary was even explained in Korean. Because the language course is established in the theological college, what we had learned in the textbook was about the religion and the god, but this is not related to my own academic discipline at all. Anyway, I passed the language test there. (Wan_MA, 12-19)

Another example is exactly the opposite of the previous one. Two interviewees (Chen_MA and Wan_MA) referred the *Propädeutikum* (in English: prerequisite

²⁰⁸ It is necessary to mention that some Study-abroad Agencies (in Chinese 留学中介 or *liuxue zhongjie*) are partly to blame, as some created the "illusion" that one can ONLY learn the foreign language in the native country.

²⁰⁹ It is worth mentioning that international students are provided with maximum two-year residence for language courses for university preparation (take Berlin for an example). Source: Ausländerbehörde Berlin (Foreigners Authority) Retrieved February 29, 2012 from http://www.berlin.de/labo/auslaender/dienstleistungen/studium_de.html

²¹⁰ She had already learned 2 years German language in China, in two different courses and in two different cities; nevertheless, she found that she didn't make much progress and felt frustrated. She hoped that studying German in Germany would bring her another chance and finally passed the language test.

program) course at the Technical University of Berlin, which offers language training, subject-specific terminologies and academic knowledge. Both interviewees (Chen_MA, who attended himself and Wan_MA was familiar with that course as well) hold positive opinion about this course.

Academic German language level. Except for international master program or PhD work, all applicants have to prove their current German language proficiency, in order to pursue the study in Germany. According to the interview and questionnaire, levels of German language among interviewees vary.

Subjective evaluation. Results of Study 3 indicated that before arrival or shortly after arrival, most participants were not confident of their academic German language level. Figure 5-4 indicated that the biggest worry for Chinese students was to participate in the discussion at class, as over 61.5% participants evaluated their German proficiency of participating class discussion as “poor or very poor”. In addition, over one-third of participants regarded their ability in understanding the lecturers (34.2%) and communicating with lecturers and classmates (33.3%) as “poor or very poor” respectively. They were only confident of their German ability to finish the homework. Although good foreign language proficiency “does not necessarily guarantee participation in classroom” (Henderson, 2009, p.404), poor German language skills (listening and speaking) definitely hinders Chinese students’ courage in participating in the class discussion.

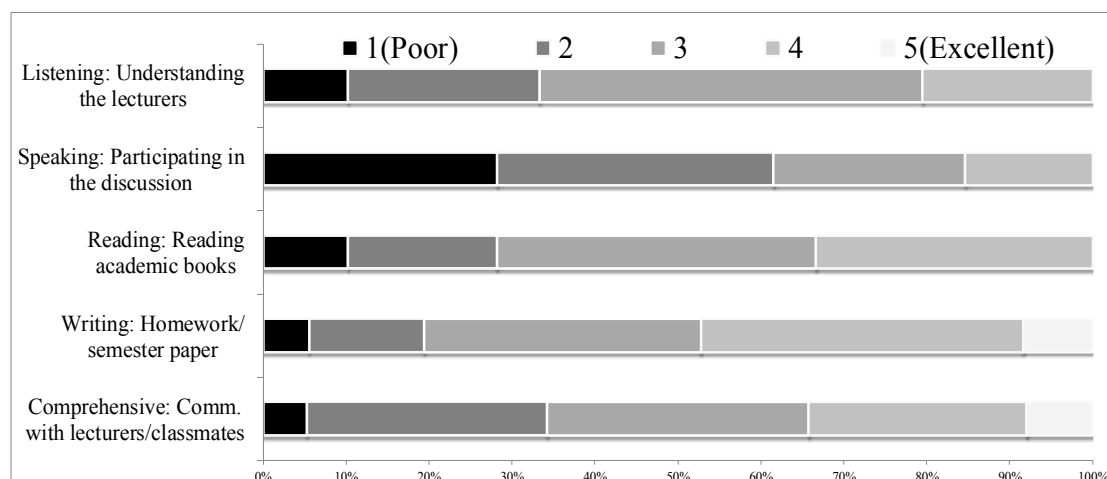


Figure 5-4: Self-evaluated academic German language level according to Study 3

It is important to point out that various language skills are close correlated (see Table 5-8). The results of self-evaluation indicated that “understanding the lecturers” are closely related to “participating in the discussions” ($r=.68$, $p<0.01$) and “communicating with lecturers/classmates” ($r=.65$, $p<0.05$). The more Chinese students understand in the lectures, the more confident they are in participating in the discussion at class and in communicating with their lecturers and classmates. In addition, “reading academic books” and “homework” are also closely related ($r=.73$, $p<0.01$). These two academic tasks mainly depend on off-class performance.

In addition, Chinese students registered in international master program or did PhD research were more confident of their English level (see Figure 5-5). Nevertheless, only 24.1% of them regarded their language skill of “participating in the discussion” as good or very good. This result is similar to the Chinese students attending courses in German language. Based on the result of Study 3, no matter the courses language is English or German, on arrival, Chinese students encountered difficulty in participating in the class discussion.

Table 5-8: Correlation of German language level based on self-evaluation according to Study 3 (N=24)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
(1) Listening: Understanding the lecturers	1				
(2) Speaking: Participating in the discussion	.68**	1			
(3) Reading: Reading academic books	.35*	.38*	1		
(4) Writing: Homework or semester paper	.38*	.45**	.73**	1	
(5) Comprehensive: Comm. with lecturers/classmates	.65**	.58**	.37*	.49**	1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

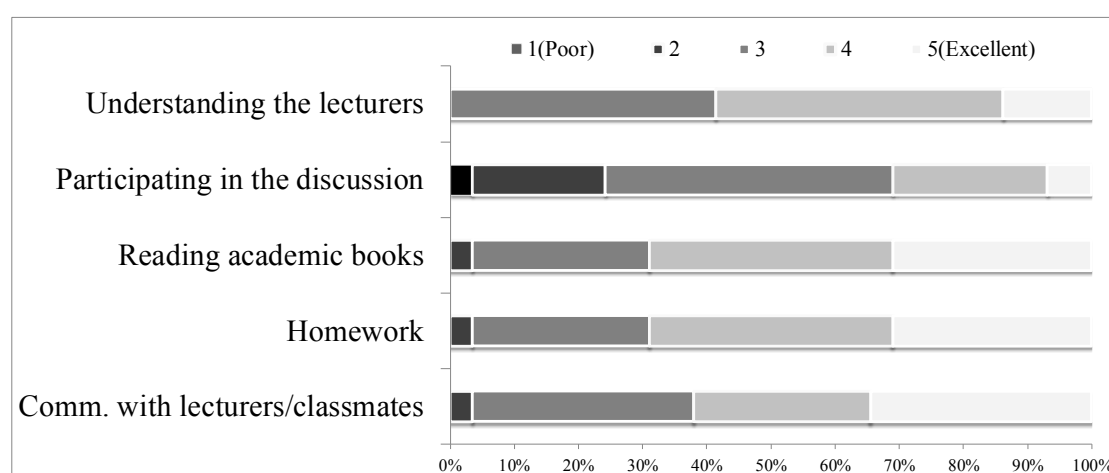


Figure 5-5: Self-evaluated academic English language level according to Study 3

Objective evaluation. International students have to prove their German language skills when they apply to German universities (unless they meet the requirement of exemption). Standard German language test, such as *Deutsche Sprachprüfung für den Hochschulzugang* (DSH), “Test – Deutsch als Fremdsprache” (TestDaF), or “‘Prüfungsteil Deutsch’ der Feststellungsprüfung an Studienkollegs”²¹¹ are accepted by most German universities. If international students take TestDaF, they are required to obtain the score of 4 (TDN-4) in all four parts of the test (listening, reading, writing

²¹¹ Retrieved September 7, 2011, from Hochschulrektorenkonferenz (HRK)
http://www.hrk.de/de/hrk_international/137_5633.php

and speaking) by most of universities, and if they participate in DSH, they are expected to achieve a DSH-2 or DSH-3²¹².

In Study 1, those interviewees attending German-speaking courses all passed the standard German test, including the exchange student. In Study 3, 54 out of 55 participants answered the question, half of them passed the standard test (48.1%), the other half (49.1%) have not participated in any test yet, and one interviewee attended but failed the test (see Figure 5-6).²¹³ About two-thirds of Chinese students enrolled in German-speaking programs passed the German language test. In terms of the bilingual master's program (English and German), half of participants have passed the test as well. To those Chinese students who are pursuing international master's program or doctoral studies, merely 14.2% passed the German language test.

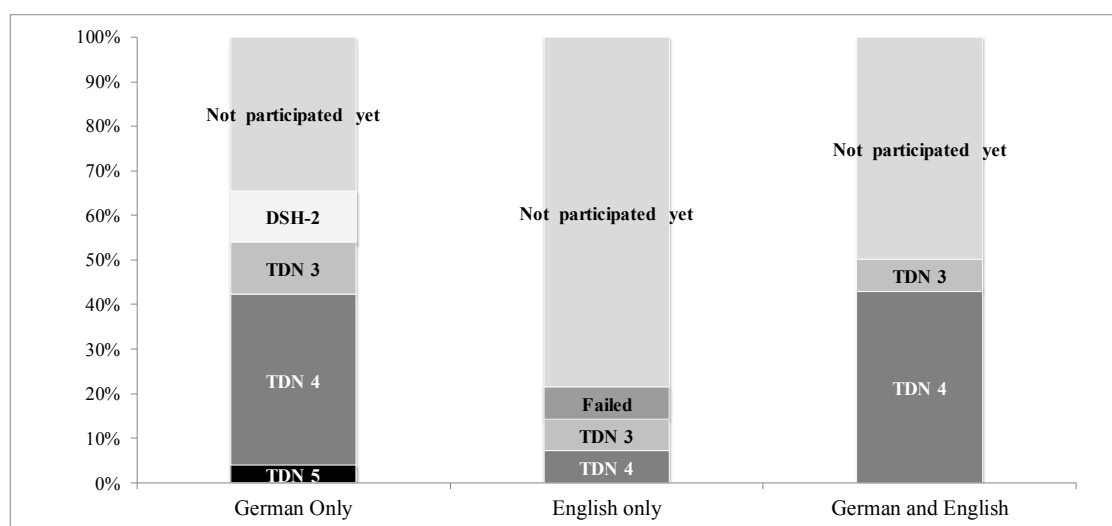


Figure 5-6: Result of the standard German test according to Study 3

Daily German language level. In addition to the academic language level, Chinese students' competence in daily condition is also important. All respondents (including Chinese students in the international program) in Study 3 were required to assess their daily German language level (see Figure 5-7). About half of the Chinese students worried that they would have difficulty in expressing themselves during daily communication or read newspaper or magazines, as 48.1% of them regarded their daily German as "poor or relative poor". In addition, they expressed difficulty in understanding daily communication and to read post and letters in German.

²¹² Some universities take the specific requirement of certain disciplines into consideration, and make exceptions for applicants of certain majors (Mathematics, British and American Studies, Art and Music). Take the admission requirement of University of Bielefeld as an example: international students are accepted with Level-3 TestDaF Certificate (Level 3 in all four subtests = 4 x 3) or a Level-1 DSH Certificate. Retrieved October 25, 2011, from [http://www.uni-bielefeld.de/\(en\)/International/Students/-Sprache/](http://www.uni-bielefeld.de/(en)/International/Students/-Sprache/)

²¹³ Some Chinese students in Study 3 participating in an exchange programs or cooperative programs between Chinese and German universities, students are allowed to improve their German language after arrival; therefore, for them the German language test was currently not obligatory.

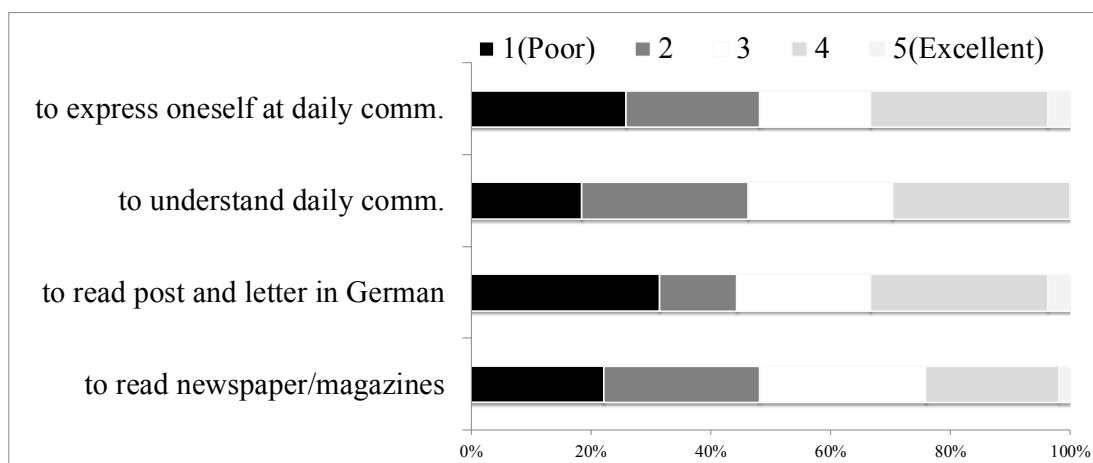


Figure 5-7: Self-evaluated daily German language level according to Study 3

To those non-German-speaking Chinese students, they were not confronted with much challenge at the university, as English is the working language; nevertheless, to deal with daily life in Germany is a challenge. As one interviewee (Ting_MA) mentioned that she didn't bothered to open any post at the beginning of his study, as all the post (e.g. health insurance or banking) were written in German; as a result, she missed many important notification.

Soft skill 1: knowledge about Germany and German universities

Chinese students' knowledge about Germany and German universities is an important soft skill, as good knowledge of norms, customs, and values of the host culture facilitates sojourners' adjustment (Church, 1982; Pruitt, 1978). Redmond (2000) further suggested that knowledge of the host culture is one of the compositions of intercultural communication competence. In this part, Chinese students' knowledge about Germany and German universities is to be discussed.

Knowledge about Germany in general. The results of both interviews and questionnaire indicated that only a small number of Chinese students, before beginning the study in Germany, have obtained some knowledge about Germany and German universities. In the questionnaire (Study 3), over 35.0 % of participants evaluated their knowledge about "German society, cultures and custom" (38.0%) and evaluated "political, economic and historical information" (36.4%) as "poor or very poor" respectively. Although most of them had not been to Germany before, during the preparation for the trip to Germany, Chinese students searched for information about daily life (weather, food, accommodation, traffic, etc.) in Germany. Less than one-third (30.9%) participants in the questionnaire regarded their knowledge about daily life in Germany "good or excellent".²¹⁴

²¹⁴ Similar results have been reached by a questionnaire among Chinese students, as Zhou (2010) found that 49.7% Chinese students haven't prepared for their stay in Germany. It is worth mentioning that Zhou

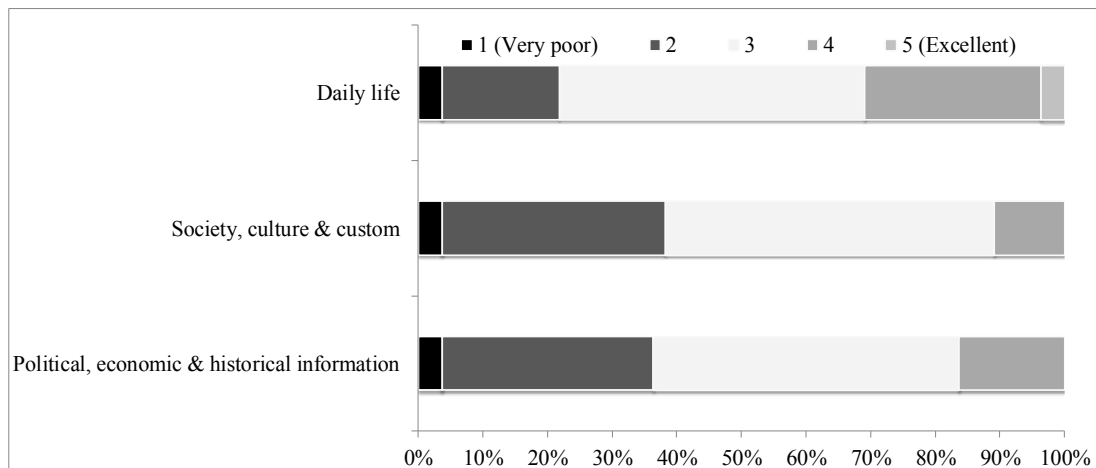


Figure 5-8: Knowledge of Germany as a country according to Study 3

The result of interviews similarly indicated that before coming to Germany, very few interviewees prepared for the trip to Germany and the future study by intensifying knowledge about Germany (Ying_MA read books concerning history, religion, culture, and customs, and music in Germany), while others admitted that they only had basic knowledge about Germany, which was either obtained at the geography or history class in the middle school (mentioned by Sun_PhD) or through media (internet, TV, radio, newspaper, etc.). Nevertheless, interviewees (Lee_MA, Chen_MA, and Pang_MA) indicated that media had provided them merely a rough idea about Germany as a country.

It is worth noting that the group of *German-majors* is an exception: their previous academic and language background helped them to know more concrete information about Germany. Compared with non-German majors, they were familiar with German university and German culture. One interviewee majoring in German Study for four years (bachelor) mentioned:

As German-majors, we had German lecturers teaching us courses in China; therefore, I've heard about "Volesung" and "Seminar". [...] I met many Germans and had some in-depth communication, both positive and negative. To be frank, I didn't have too much expectation or worries before coming to Germany. (Wang_MA, 40-40)

Moreover, interviewees mentioned that their German teachers in China invited them to the parties in China and cooked for them (Fang_BA, 120-121); or they were familiar with some daily issue in Germany, e.g. they knew "unlike in China, bus comes according to the timetable in Germany" (Jia_MA, 153-158). To some extent, some basic knowledge about Germany becomes an important skill facilitating their

(2010) found the result based on a questionnaire. It is not clear in that study how respondents interpret the question, and to those who answer "yes", to which extends did they prepare for the study.

understanding of Germany as a country, which might further ease their initial encounter in Germany.

Knowledge about German universities. To international students, the knowledge about German universities are equally significant. Compared with the pre-departure knowledge about Germany, Chinese students reported having even less knowledge of the learning forms, examination, homework or academic resources at German universities. Figure 5-9 demonstrated the results in the questionnaires (Study 3). 44.4% and 41.2% participants evaluating their knowledge about “Homework” and “Academic resources” as “poor or very poor” respectively. In addition, about 40% of respondents regarded their knowledge about “Lectures and seminars” and “Examinations” as “poor or very poor”. Although it might be too demanding to ask Chinese students to know German universities well as before arriving in Germany; it is necessary for them to increase the knowledge about German universities, as Chan and Drover (1997) held that “the daily tasks of living and studying (on and off campus) considered as being as important as complexities and complication of cultural difference” (p.60).

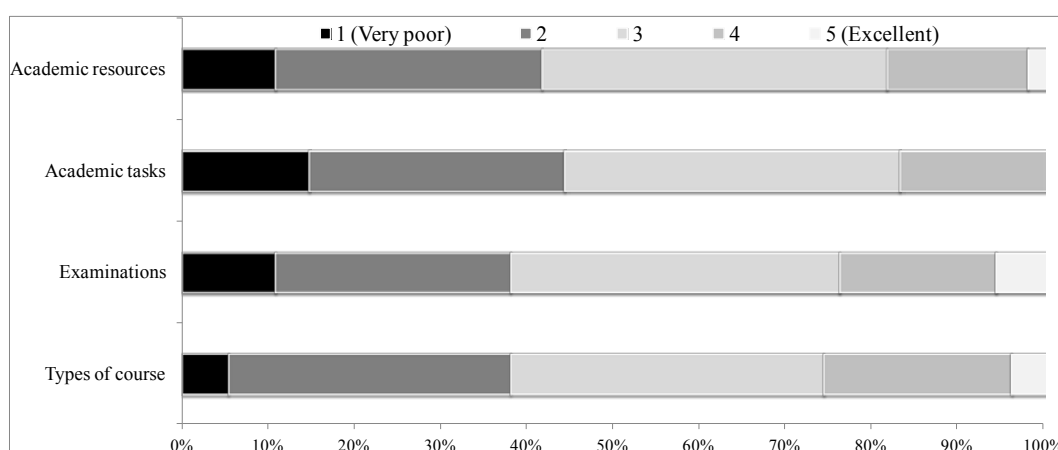


Figure 5-9: Knowledge of German universities according to Study 3

Source of the pre-departure knowledge. In the questionnaire (Study 3), Chinese students were asked to tell the source of getting familiar with Germany and German universities (see Table 5-9).

Table 5-9: Source of obtaining knowledge about Germany and German universities according to Study 3

Source of information	Choice 1	Choice 2	Choice 3	Total
Message or post on internet forum	24	10	17	51
Consulting Chinese students studied/studying in Germany	17	19	9	45
Homepage of the German University	3	12	11	26
German Course	8	9	8	25
German friends	2	4	9	15
Other	1	0	0	1
Haven't searched yet	0	1	0	1
Total	55	55	54	

(i) **“Second-hand” information shared by Chinese students.** Some students first leaned back to the information and suggestions on internet, as they argued that their language proficiency was not good enough to read the instruction in German. *Message* or *post* (in Chinese 帖子 or *tiezi*) written and shared by Chinese students studying in Germany on internet forum was the main source of information about Germany and German university for Chinese students in Study 3. Fifty-one out of 55 (92.7%) Chinese students in Study 3 obtained information about Germany and German universities by means of reading the message or post shared on internet forum. In addition, another popular source among 55 Chinese students is to “consult Chinese students studied/studying in Germany” (81.8%). Furthermore, result of interviews is consistent with the questionnaire, as interviewees mentioned that they first contacted those exchange students returning from Germany (Zhou_MA, Yin_PhD, and Wang_MA). Only one respondent (Pang_MA) admitted that she hadn’t search for the information concerning German universities.

(ii) **Homepage of German universities and other supporting.** German universities provide the prospect international and home prospect students with considerable information about the university, programs and courses, and application requirements on their homepages. In addition, some German support organizations such as DAAD²¹⁵ and HRK-Hochschulkompass²¹⁶ provide a large amount of information about German universities and available programs. Furthermore, some brochures provide important information and useful tips.²¹⁷ Nevertheless, less than half of participants (Study 3) turned to the homepage of the German university for information. Interview results demonstrated similar result, as only one student mentioned that she had read the original information provided by university thoroughly.

What I’ve read (in China) was not simply the experience shared by other Chinese students. Instead, I read through the homepage of the university. [...] Some of us might think that it takes too much time to read everything in German, but I realized that this information is first-hand. I regarded it as the first challenge of studying in Germany: if reading information written in German language makes me feel upset, how can I manage the future study in Germany? Therefore, I was “digging at” the information about the introduction of the university and application process on the homepage.
(Lee_MA, 70-72)

²¹⁵ DAAD, moreover, supplies advice for German-learning, support for living and daily life on its website as well.

²¹⁶ HRK-Hochschulkompass (in English: German Rector's Conference-Higher Education Compass) provides information on Germany's higher education institutions, on the range of studies and programs. Retrieved from <http://www.hochschulkompass.de/>

²¹⁷ One brochure titled “100 Questions and answers for Chinese applicants for studying in Germany, an initiative of the DAAD lecturers (in German: DAAD-Lektoren) in the People’s Republic” is clearly cover the following fields.

(iii) Information achieved at German language courses. Foreign language is closely related to the culture and history of the host country. German courses not only provide language training, but also introduce much important information about German culture, history, and German universities. It is interesting to mention that some of the lecturers of the German courses studied in Germany themselves and they were willing to share their experience with other Chinese students (mentioned by Lee_MA).

Soft skill 2: previous intercultural experience and intercultural training

Previous intercultural experience and intercultural training facilitate the subsequent sojourner adjustment (Church, 1982); nevertheless, only few Chinese students had been abroad. Moreover, none of the interviewees have attended any intercultural training before. Eight students in all three studies had been to Germany before;²¹⁸ while other participants mentioned that it was their first time to be in Germany/ abroad. In contrast, with the promotion of integration of European Higher Education, there is long tradition of intensive student and faculty exchange in Europe, thanks to the ERASMUS program²¹⁹ and Leonardo program²²⁰. The result of this research indicated only Chinese students majored in German language and literature had previous intercultural experience (interaction with native speaker, and knowledge about Germany through learning materials) and two of them (Jing_MA and Yang_MA) have been to Germany as exchange students, the others participants have reported they hardly had any intercultural experience.

On the other hand, not many students have realized the importance of such intercultural training. Notwithstanding the increasing number of Chinese graduates going Germany for advanced study and ever closer academic partnership established between Chinese and German universities, there is few institutions offering intercultural training course university-wide in China. Recently, the Center for Foreign Language Training at the Tongji University, cooperated with DAAD, developed an the intercultural training program for Chinese students, aiming at helping those Chinese students planning studying in Germany to develop the intercultural competence for adjustment and improving their ability of communicative written and speaking ability at the German

²¹⁸ In Study 1, one student had been to University of Bochum for one year as an exchange student and in Study 2, six out of 55 interviewees (10.9%) have been to Germany (purposes of the travel are not clearly stated), and in Study 3, one student had been University of Oldenburg for one semester as exchange student.

²¹⁹ According to the European Commission, “ERASMUS is the EU’s flagship education and training program enabling 200 000 students to study and work abroad each year. In addition, it funds co-operation between higher education institutions across Europe. The program not only supports students, but also professors and business staff who want to teach abroad, as well as helping university staff to receive training.” Retrieved January 23, 2011 from EU’s website http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/doc80_en.htm

²²⁰ Short for “Leonardo da Vinci programme”, which is another important part of the lifelong learning programme supported by European’s Union, in addition to besides the “Erasmus Programme”. Retrieved January 23, 2011, from EU’s website http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/doc78_en.htm

university.²²¹ One interviewee (Wan_MA) receiving language training at German Centre at Tongji University particularly mentioned the intercultural training program and felt regret that she hadn't attended it. In addition, there are some private or individual organizations provide the training as well.²²²

Soft skill 3: psychological readiness

Before departure, it is understandable that one has some sense of insecurity and is worried about the future. Oei and Notowidjojo (1990) suggest that expectation of difficulty is one of the best predictors for depression among international students. Interviewees were asked their worries and their attitudes before departure. The following part introduces the psychological readiness: what Chinese students are worried about and their attitudes to the worry.

Contents of worries. Before departure, Chinese students were worried about the daily and academic challenges, and they had some financial worries as well. First, generally speaking, respondents in the interviews first worried about the difficulty in the daily life: for example, one interviewee (Zhou_MA) mentioned that he had expected the difficulty of using daily German language. In addition, two students also mentioned that they were worried whether they would be discriminated (Zhou_MA) or attracted by those people who were racist (Ting_MA).

In addition to the daily-oriented problem, Chinese student showed some difficulty in the study as well. One interviewee showed her concern:

Many (students) have said that it is difficult to achieve the study in Germany. Because of this, I just worried I might fail the study in the middle.
(Pang_MA, 71-71)

Actually, Chinese students have heard that the duration of study in Germany is much longer than that in some English-speaking countries (mentioned by Wan_MA and Chen_MA); and the experience shared by other Chinese students studying in Germany becomes an “early warning” and they perceived the difficulty. For example, they had expected that their current German language level might not be sufficient for the study at German universities.

I had expected that the study in Germany would be very difficult. [...] I've watched some documentary film about Chinese students studying abroad.

²²¹ The training course offers four modules: (1) theory and practice of intercultural training; (2) the application of spoken and written German language at German universities; (3) campus and daily life in Germany; (4) training for applying for internship and job. Retrieved March 1, 2012, from <http://dk.tongji.edu.cn/germany.asp>

²²² For example, one interview (Lee_MA) mentioned one private organization called “The home of Laowa” (in Chinese 老瓦之家 or *laowa zhi jia*) helped Chinese students to prepare for the application for APS and future life in Germany.

[...] Although my parents support me financially and I don't have to worry about the financing problem, I did expect some difficulty in the study, the language, and the daily life in Germany. How difficult it would be to learn a new subject in a foreign language. (Zhao_MA, 47-50)

Furthermore, Chinese students were worried about the financial burden to parents:

There were too many things to worry on departure, but my biggest worry is how to live up to my parents' hope. I feel really guilty to spend my parents' money. (Sun_PhD, 76-77)

The majority of Chinese students studying in Germany were financially supported by their parents or come from a wage-earner's family; they regarded the expenses of studying abroad as a burden to their parents.

Attitudes towards the worries. When Chinese students were further asked how they dealt with the worry, they used two Chinese idioms to express their attitudes. First, some held a pessimistic attitude: When the arrow is on the string it must go (in Chinese 箭在弦上,不得不发). In spite of the worries, they were still determined to go to Germany. One interviewee (Pang_MA) vividly compared her current situation as “the arrow on the string” and she had no other choices but “drew the bow and let it go”. Since Chinese students (and their family) had invested much time, energy, and money in preparing for studying in Germany, they wouldn't give up all of a sudden. It seems that there is no turning back. Second, others have an optimistic attitude: Cross that bridge when you come to it (in Chinese 船到桥头自然直). Compared with the relative pessimistic attitude, some Chinese students expressed confidence, for example “Even challenged by the difficulties, I think I can manage” (Zhou_MA, 112-112) or “I didn't speak any German, but I've heard German colleagues speak English well. [...] Moreover, even there are problems, I will solve them. In the end things will mend (in Chinese 车到山前必有路)” (Yin_PhD, 68-77). It is worth mentioning that all three are male students, and believed they could find solutions to the difficulty.

5.2.4 Goal of studying in Germany

The most important goal among interviewees is to manage the study and achieve the academic degree (in Chinese 学有所成 or *xueyousuocheng*) in Germany. To set a goal before studying abroad is important, as Gong and Chang (2007) proposed that academic goal set by international students themselves is positively related to their academic adjustment. The interviewees indicated that they were determined to learn the true knowledge (in Chinese 求真知 or *qiu zhenzhi*) and take the study seriously at German universities:

Ever since making the decision of studying in Germany, I am very determined in achieving the study in Germany and learn the “true knowledge” in Germany. (Sun_PhD, 147-147)

Frankly, I don't want to just rush for an academic degree in Germany. Some people hinted to me that my major – media science – is easy to get the degree, as some courses just require students to write a semester paper. Nevertheless, as long as one has the opportunity to study abroad, he should take it seriously. (Wan_MA, 33-33)

In order to achieve the goal, some of them have a plan in details. For example, the law student (Sun_PhD) drew a knowledge-based pyramid: the top is his doctoral thesis, the middle sections are Civil Law and Philosophy of Law respectively, and the base is German philosophy and literature, which he regarded as the attainment of one's knowledge. Furthermore, one doctoral student (Yin_PhD) clearly stated that his plans: to publish articles in the journals in his research area and to participate in international-level conferences. Nevertheless, others have a relative rough plan of what he or she wanted to achieve in the coming years in Germany in each area. For instance, one PhD student had an elementary plan what he would do in his research (Wu_PhD) and one theology-major planned to have the knowledge of the history of Christianity (Jing_MA).

5.2.5 Conclusion: the pre-departure phase, all in a hurry

Chinese students have demonstrated different degree of readiness in the pre-departure phase, which depends on their previous academic and language background, motivation, and intercultural experience. It is true that one cannot prepare everything and be equipped with both excellent hard and soft skills for the study in Germany, however, based on the analysis of result in the pre-departure phase, the majority of Chinese students hurriedly go through the process for application; hence, the preparation is mainly daily life-oriented, and their German language, knowledge about Germany and German universities is not sufficient. Because of this, not many of them prepared psychologically well for the potential challenge.

First, Chinese students had a busy schedule of preparing for studying in Germany before departure. The interview indicates that once Chinese students had made the decision of studying in Germany, they immediately faced a busy schedule: to learn the German language from the very beginning (by attending German courses), to attend the standard German language exam, to pass the *APS*, and apply to the German university, and prepare for the luggage/departure. According to the interviews, Chinese students often spent one and half years for the whole process. Based on the interviews with Chinese students, with very few exceptions, most of them prepared for the application alongside their full-time university student life. Such busy schedule makes it impossible

for them to find enough time to concentrate on the preparation to know Germany and German universities. For example, instead of taking time to dig a little deeper into the original text provided by German universities or read pertinent books introducing German history and culture, most Chinese students only managed to obtain some “second-hand” information/experience shared by other Chinese students who are currently studying/ studied in Germany.

Second, the preparation is a daily life-oriented. The busy schedule leaves Chinese students little time for preparing for the future study in Germany: they only managed a daily life-oriented preparation. It is true that almost every participant searched some information about Germany and German universities, nevertheless, within such short period of time, Chinese students preoccupy themselves with a daily life-oriented preparation (preparing for the luggage and searching for the accommodation in Germany), as the self-assessment in this research manifested that Chinese students’ knowledge about Germany (including political and historical information; society, culture and custom; and daily life) was relative limited: averagely, less than one-fifth of respondents participating in the questionnaire reported that their knowledge about Germany is good or excellent.²²³ Based on the result, most Chinese students did not know much about Germany and the society, which causes the initial difficulty in the adjustment process. Similar result is reached by Chinese students studying in the UK (Zhou & Todman, 2008). In addition, it is suggested that Chinese students are not prepared for the dialogic nature of classroom communication in the New Zealand school (Holmes, 2004). In conclusion, the result of the interview reveals that Chinese students received some systematic pre-departure preparation (i.e. students majored in German language and literature or exchange students who received some preparation-information in advance) at pre-departure are more familiar with Germany and German universities.

Third, Chinese students’ German language proficiency is insufficient. As discussed previously, the German language proficiency of Chinese students varies; the majority of Chinese participants’ German language proficiency is exam-oriented. Theoretically, one meets the minimum language requirement of studying at German universities, as long as he passes the standard German test; nevertheless, Chinese students indicated later that their German level was not sufficient. Although participants subjectively indicated that they were not confident of their language proficiency; notwithstanding, their “ambitious” schedule simply didn’t allow them to “waste” any time in China, and they would like to start the academic journey in Germany as soon as possible.

Forth, psychologically, some Chinese students had not expected much potential challenge. Although Chinese students have been informed of the difficulty in Germany,

²²³ The average good (when respondents answered “good” or “excellent”) knowledge about Germany (19.4%) is based on: political and historical information (16.4%), society, custom, and culture (10.9%) and “daily life” (30.9%).

most respondents seemed to be confident of managing the study. One interviewee mentioned “I was longing for studying abroad to broaden my academic horizon, and I didn’t think too much about the difficulty concerning studying in Germany” (Ying_MA, 9-10). In the meantime, since the majorities of interviewees were self-funded students, they and were supported financially by their parents, they indicated some worries.

5.3 Initial phase: the battle starts

All things are difficult before they become easy.

万事开头难。

— *Chinese proverb*

The first semester at a German university was a big challenge for many Chinese students. This part will introduce the Chinese students’ initial experience at German universities and explore their perception, understanding/emotion and reactions in the initial phase of their academic adjustment from the Chinese learning environment to the German one.

5.3.1 Cognitive-dimension: initial learning experience

The challenge of the initial phase for Chinese students is to get familiar with the new learning environment. Macrae (1997) suggested international students often come across difficulty in adjusting to new academic modes and encounter following problems: “(i) being unable to participate fully in seminars, (ii) developing academic self-discipline; (iii) acquiring adequate feedback on performance; (iv) coping with the variety of assignments; (v) understanding examination methods and developing appropriate techniques” (p.139). Inspired by this, this part will introduce how Chinese students deal with types of courses, academic task, forms of examinations, etc.

Planning and organizing the study: exploring the Modul-System

Before studying at a German university, Chinese students first encounter the challenge of planning and organizing the study: first of all, they need to get familiar with the Modul-System and making a curriculum plan by themselves. The concept *Modul* is a learning unit at German universities, which designs to meet certain objectives, and each Module is composed of complementary courses (lectures, seminar, exercise classes or tutorial). When students finish all the courses required by a *Module*, they will attend a *Modulabschlussprüfung* (in English: Module exam). After finishing all the *Moduls* required by the faculty, students will achieve the academic degree (bachelor or master).

First, the Chinese students perceived the difficulty which caused by not being familiar with the Modul-System. Because of the initial confusion about the Modul-System, many Chinese students in the interviews reported that the first semester was a “catastrophe”; they had been in a state of chaos and they “wasted” one semester, before fully understanding how the Modul-System worked. There are two examples:

I remembered, one of my Chinese friends attended FOUR courses the first semester.²²⁴ At the end of the semester, he took THREE exams and passed TWO of them. Unfortunately, he eventually found one of the courses that he had passed was redundant.²²⁵ In the end of the first semester, he only achieved the credit point for ONE course. What a mess!” (Chen_MA, 33-33)

I expected the difficulty in participating in the seminar, so I decided to attend lectures the first semester. I chose two lectures and attended both of them the first semester. When I registered for the exams of these two lectures at the end of the semester, the staff at the registrar’s office told me that these two exams are Modulabschlussprüfung of two Moduls, as these two lectures actually belonged to two different Moduls. I was shocked when I heard about this, as I still hadn’t finished the other courses (e.g. seminar) required by Modul yet, how could I take the Modulabschlussprüfung? [...] The mistake I made the first semester leads to the problems the second semester. I was overwhelmed. (Wan_MA, 33-49; 61-61)

Facing such difficulty, Chinese students either studied the course catalog alone or asked tutors for help.

I printed the Studienordnung (study regulation), which was more than 30 pages. I marked all the introductory courses and read the course introduction thoroughly. As I still could not figure out the content of the courses, I finally went to the tutor for help. At the beginning of the first semester, I went to her office hour every week, and she introduced the courses to me. Finally, I began to understand the rule in choosing the courses here. (Jing_MA, 32-32; 40-40)

Second, they realized the difficulty in arranging the progress of their study. Chinese students had no idea how many courses they should take for each semester. Some participants in Study 1 indicated they either had taken too many courses (consequently experiencing too much academic stress) or too few (failing to achieve the goal of obtaining certain credit points as they had planned):

²²⁴ The example that interviewee mentioned was a master student.

²²⁵ Here means the credit point he obtained for this course was not counted for the overall credit points for the master study.

I was too greedy the first semester and planned to finish two Moduls (one lecture and one seminar for each Modul). But at the end of the semester, I only managed one Modul (namely, one lecture and one seminar). (Jing_MA, 44-44)

I was fully aware that my German language was very poor, so I didn't choose many courses the first semester. However, the second semester, I just chose too many courses and was under pressure. It is really too difficult for me to manage the balance (between choosing too many and too few). [...] It is a big challenge for me to plan the schedule by myself. (Pang_MA, 49-49; 225-225)

In the first semester, I had too many courses and just didn't have time to digest what I was learning. [...] If I could turn the clock back, I would have taken my time, instead of doing so many courses in a hurried manner. (Lee_MA, 54-54)

Two reasons explain why Chinese students encountered so much difficulty in the first semester. On the one hand, the Module-System is a brand new concept to most Chinese students. In China, Chinese students received a syllabus in the first week of the new semester. It is common that study plan is already arranged by the faculty, especially for the bachelor's programs. Students don't need to make a study plan or curricula; instead, they just attend lectures following the timetable. Nevertheless, in Germany, within the frame of study regulation (in German: Studienordnung), students have more autonomy in choosing courses by themselves. In this case, Chinese students first have to understand the concept of Module and the combination of the courses within one Module (e.g. "lecture + seminar", "lecture + exercises", or "lecture + seminar + exercise"). Although Chinese students have been informed of the Modul-System before arrival, they merely have a rough idea about it. Such result is inconsistent with Zhou's (2010) finding that 58.9% Chinese students encountered difficulty in organizing the study in Germany.

On the other hand, Chinese students had difficulties in quickly grasping the information introduced at the orientation course, due to the limited German language proficiency at the beginning. At the orientation course, academic staff did introduce the concept and fundamental principle of "Moduls" to all freshmen. It took German students some time as well to fully understand the rule or make an efficient course syllabus. But unlike their German counterpart, Chinese students failed to immediately understand the explanation of "rule" of Modul-System, due to the language problem.²²⁶ In the meantime, they need to pay attention to the *Modulabschlussprüfung* (final Module-exam), which also links to

²²⁶ In addition, some courses are not available in both winter and summer semesters. If one misses one course in one semester, he has to wait for one semester or even two semesters to have the second chance to attend it.

the Modul. Consequently, one mistake of arranging the time and the course will result in the extension of study time.

Attending various types of courses

In addition to the study-planning and selection of courses, Chinese students are challenged by new types of courses. There are seven main types of classes at German universities: lectures, exercise classes, seminars, introductory seminars, practical courses or laboratory work, field course and excursions (Kehm, 1999). The combination varies from discipline to discipline, university to university.²²⁷ Except for lecture or laboratory work, the majority types of course (including “Hauptseminar”, “Projektseminar”, “Forshungseminar”, etc.) are relative new to the majority of Chinese students. One Chinese student mentioned: “It is important to adjust to the various courses here at German university: lecture, seminar, exercise class, as in China, we don’t have so many different types of courses” (Rong_MA, 65-69).

Lecture. Lecture (in German: Vorlesung) is one of the most important types of courses, in which professors or lecturers deliver “systematic overviews of disciplines” (Peisert & Framhein, 1990, p.57). The main academic tasks for students at lectures are to listen, to take notes, to learn and understand; in addition, students are expected to do additional reading after class (Kehm, 1999). In Germany, a lecture is often accompanied with a seminar (in German: Seminar) or exercise classes (in German: Übung). Compared with other forms of courses (seminar, exercises, projects, etc.), which is to be discussed in the following part, Chinese students reported that they were more familiar with the form of lecture, as it is the most common type of course in China. In spite of that, they reported difficulty in understanding the lectures, which further resulted in the participation in the lecture.

First, Chinese students mentioned they have great difficulty in understanding the lectures. In terms of listening, Cammish (1997) held that international students were expected not only to understand the content of lectures, but also to be able to follow the fast and informal registers used in discussion. Chinese students in Study 1 and Study 2 mentioned that they failed to catch up the lecturers, although they had passed the standard German tests, their German language proficiency was not good enough to follow the lecturers.

At the beginning, I understood nothing at lectures. I just saw the lip of the professor was moving, but I could not understand any single word.
(Pang_MA, 106-106)

²²⁷ For example, the combination of lecture + seminar or exercises classes is common to humanities; while the academic field of engineering science attaches more importance to lecture + exercise classes and laboratory work.

At lectures, the professor kept on talking. I was still thinking about his words in the first part and he already moved to the second part. There were no PowerPoint slides at all and I had nothing to refer (Wan_MA, 33-33).

It is worth noting that Chinese students from various academic fields reported that they had difficulty in understanding the lectures. For instance, even Chinese students having German language background²²⁸ encountered language problems at lectures at the beginning of the study, and this was not smooth as they had expected.

The first semester, I was easily absent-minded at lectures. (Rong_MA, 62-62)

Although all Chinese students attending this program have passed TestDaF or DSH, [...] it is far from enough. At lectures, I have great difficulty in understanding what lecturers say. Given the same period of time, I simply cannot fulfill the task as my German peers. I've tried my best. (Qian_MA, 75-76)

In contrast, Chinese students in English-speaking international master program seemed to encounter less difficulty. Although they met some terminologies in English at lectures, the language alone didn't challenge them at the beginning.

To deal with the lecture is no problem at all, as our teaching language is English. Although the lecturer sometimes referred to some terminologies, it didn't prevent from understanding. (Cao_MA, 113-120)

Our teaching language is English. Except for certain words or slangs, generally speaking, there is no big problem for me to understand. (Ting_MA, 71-76)

Second, Chinese students "keep silence" at class. Chinese students realized that they were not as active as their German peers at class. They attributed to the silence as a custom that they developed in the Chinese learning environment, which made them feel embarrassed to raise a question or participate in the discussion. Previous research suggested that such silence might result from language barrier, moral in Chinese education (saving face, being humble), and student-teacher relationship in China (Zhu, 2007).

Professors always left some time for us raising question at the end of the lecture, but none of us (80% of the participants were Chinese) asked any question and just kept silent, which made the lecturer feel very awkward. (Fang_BA, 96-96)

²²⁸ Chinese students with German background are those who majored in German language and literature studies in their bachelor's study.

Some of the Chinese students who are not so good in German and they never bother to raise any opinion at class. (Yang_MA, 116-119)

It is difficult to judge whether Chinese students are really “silent” or “being passive” at class. Thinking is invisible. Chinese students often leave an impression that they are silent at class. As non-native German speakers, especially at the beginning of the study, they need more time to think about the question than native students. Considering language challenges, the procedures of input (listening and understanding), process the knowledge (thinking about), and output (expressing opinions) for Chinese students takes much longer than their German counterparts do. It is important to mention that social science students mention the problem of “silence” more often than engineering students.

Seminar. Seminar is one of the features of academic instruction in Germany, in which “more advanced or more in-depth knowledge (including methodological issues) is conveyed and discussed” (Kehm, 1999, p.107). At seminars, students play a more active role through giving presentations and participating in group discussions, while the role of lecturer is no longer as dominate as they do at lectures. There are two main difficulties for Chinese students at seminars: both as participant and as presenter.

First, as participants, Chinese students have difficulties in understanding and participating in the discussion. Similar to the situation at lectures, Chinese students had difficulties in understanding the content at seminars; nevertheless, they were also expected to take part in the discussion at the seminar. Participants in Study 1 and Study 2 referred to the difficulty of keeping up with the rapid pace of conversation/interaction and tempo of the discussion at the seminar (Wang_MA, 70-74) and they didn’t know how to grasp the important information at the seminar (Jing_MA, 32-32). It happened quite often that Chinese students were still “digesting” the previous question, their peer German students have already moved on to the next topic, which caused the feeling of being left “outside” of the discussion. Similar results have been reported by Sovic (2009). One master student majored in Education shared his experience:

When German students were discussing, I found that I was “outside” of the topic, because I understood and digested the content of the knowledge in another way. The language is one problem; the content of the discussion is another. I didn’t understand the text well. [...] Sometimes I thought I had understood the content, but when German students discussed about it at the seminar, I realized that I had not really understood it; other times, I expected the lecturer would explained more about the text, as the text is difficult to me; but he just quickly mentioned it and explained other issues. This is exactly the problem I am facing now. (Wang_MA, 74-74)

Second, as a presenter, Chinese students did not know how to lead the seminar or deliver a presentation. Delivering a presentation at a seminar was actually a demanding

job for them, as one interviewee (Ting_MA) pointed out that one needed to have a good comprehensive skill (which requires presenter understanding the content of the presentation itself), a good presentation skill, and excellent foreign language. In addition, during or after the presentation, the presenter is expected to quickly answer the questions raised by fellow students.

Furthermore, depending on the number of participants, students are expected to do individual and group presentation respectively. In terms of individual presentation, the individual presentation at the seminar pushes the presenter to the front of the stage, making him the focus of the seminar. One is expected to give a presentation and answer the question raised by other participants; in some cases, students need to lead the discussion alone for the whole class, who actually play the role as the “lecturer” or “expert of the topic”. Since they didn’t have such experience in China, this became a big challenge for them. Considering this, the individual presentation is a demanding academic task for Chinese students. As far as group presentation (teamwork) is concerned, students learn how to cooperate with each other. To some extent, what students learn at the university is also a rehearsal for their future work. They exchange opinions and ideas in preparing the presentation. Moreover, a group presentation does not pose all the pressure on a single student, instead, members share the tension. Nevertheless, unlike the individual presentation, the challenge of cooperation or teamwork emerges.

As participants, Chinese students reported that they had difficulty in participating in the discussion at the beginning. It took them some time to realize the purpose of the seminar: as an active participant, instead of as a passive listener (mentioned by Lee_MA, 77-78); and they didn’t have the sensitivity to actively participate in the discussion. Seminar will magnify the “silence” of Chinese students, as other students respond to the discussion actively.

Actually, I am not passive in the discussion. I prefer to listen to more and don't raise question very often. But I am not satisfied with my performance of participating in the seminar. (Sun_PhD, 108-108)

We just get accustomed to the tradition Chinese-way: take notes when the professor talked at lecture. But we don't have such habit of thinking and discussing with others at class. (Rong_MA, 62-62)

The first semester, I behaved very quietly at class. Because other students talked very fast, how can express my opinion, if I haven't understood them? (Lee_MA, 92-92)

As individual presenters, Chinese students found that doing presentations alone in front of other students was particularly difficult for them at the beginning of the first semester. Compared with German students, participants mentioned that they had little experience

of doing presentation before. Therefore, they felt nervous and embarrassing to do a presentation in front of others. Even those students who have experience of doing presentation in China reported that the level of requirement was much higher in Germany:

I felt nervous and shy when I had to give a presentation at the second semester. (Ting_MA, 118-118)

I was really nervous in doing the presentation. [...] I had a tremulous voice and even my voice changed. We Chinese really think too much about how others see us. [...] the seminar is actually a learning form that the presenter introduces and leads the discussion of one topic. But I just managed to “read” the text I’ve written. I guess it must be very boring to others. (Wan_MA, 52-53)

As German-majors, we did have some experience of doing a presentation when we were in China. But at that time, the requirement of doing a presentation was quite low, as we were beginning learners of German language. However, in Germany, the presentation is more academic-oriented: one needs to write outlines and informs the lecturer of the content before doing it. At the beginning of the first semester, Chinese students had no idea about it at all. (Jia_MA, 192-198)

As group presenters, during the process of cooperating with other students, Chinese students also realized and identified the learning style of other students. One Chinese student shared her experience of doing a presentation with a Finnish student.

I once had a presentation together with a Finnish girl. Unlike doing a presentation with other Chinese students, the Finnish student demonstrated much “difference”. When I did a presentation with other Chinese students, we thought alike and often came up with the similar idea. I have to admit that it is much easier to work with Chinese students, but the presentation with the Finnish girl turned out to be a new learning experience to me [...] We (Chinese students) often recite the presentation, as German is not our mother tongue and we cannot express ourselves in German that freely. [...] The Finnish student spoke excellent German, and at the presentation, she sometimes didn’t follow the “rule” that we have discussed. For example, she sometimes spoke my part or chimed in. Although it was a little bit annoying, the cooperation with her was overall good. (Yang_MA, 91-114)

Furthermore, as group-presenters, Chinese students worried that their performance will destroy the overall group performance, as students in the same group shared the note and they worried that their participation would hinder the group (Wan_MA). In addition, they also felt hurt when they found that their group member lose the patience

(Lee_MA). One Chinese female student (Wan_MA) majoring in media mentioned her experience of running away from the preparation/ discussion of group-presentation: she joined a group presentation with two German female students and the discussion (preparing for the presentation) took place at one German student's apartment. At the discussion, she could not follow the tempo of the conversation and also failed to express her thoughts. She felt awkward and could not stay any longer. She finally told the two German students: "sorry, just tell me which part I should do, I will prepare it alone at home" (Wan_MA, 74-75) and left the apartment. Obviously, she didn't find a better way to solve the problem.

Exercises class. In Germany, exercises class (in German: Übung) is one important types of courses,²²⁹ which is similar to the form of recitation supplementing lectures at American universities. At exercise classes, students are expected to "participate actively in discussing the subject matter, preparing handouts, or giving short presentations on particular aspects of the subjects" (Kehm, 1999, p.107). Exercises classes are often monitored by junior academic staff members or senior students²³⁰. Because of the "student identity" of student tutors, they are more accessible to students, as the relationship between students and tutors are at eye level. Compared with lecturers, Chinese students often turn to tutors for help. In addition to lecturers and academic staff, student tutors play an important role in the exercise classes, and they are available to help students who take part in the courses (mentioned by Pang_MA, Lee_MA, and Ting_MA), providing suggestions to both exercise and projects.

Although the exercises classes are brand new to Chinese students, it is indicated that they perceived the importance of such new types of course.

Exercise class is good, which helps me to deepen the understanding of the knowledge. We don't have that in China. (Ting_MA, 120-120)

If I could not understand the exercise, I would ask the tutor. The tutor led us do the exercises. (Pang_MA, 131-131)

I noticed that one difference of the learning form between Chinese and German universities is the exercises class is given much attention. What the professor refers will be discussed at the exercise class. (Wang_MA, 45-46)

Since there are more occasions for Chinese students to have the contact with tutors (at the exercises classes), as long as they do the project, they will go to the office hour of the tutor regularly (Pang_MA, Chen_MA, and Ting_MA). In the interviews, Chinese students in the field of engineering science and natural science mentioned they had

²²⁹ In addition, in the field of natural science or engineering, the combination of "lecture" + "exercises class/tutorial (in German *Tutorium*)" is common.

²³⁰ Senior students who play the role as tutors often once attended the similar lectures or exercise classes in this discipline themselves.

more contact with tutors than professors or lecturers. One Chinese student majoring in media science (Wan_MA) reported that, instead of face to face contact, she only had contact with tutor through emails.

Fulfilling the academic tasks: reading and writing

Reading. Academic reading plays an important role in obtaining academic knowledge. The result of the interview indicates the reading difficulty varies between social science students, natural science and engineering students. In the interviews, students majoring in natural science and engineering science didn't specify any difficulty in reading. In addition to text, they often understand the knowledge through other forms, such as doing experiments or reading formula and symbols; while Chinese students majored in social science pointed out that reading was a big challenge to them, as discussion at seminar is mainly based on the reading materials off class. In the interview, Chinese students encounter two main problems concerning reading: lacking reading skills and having difficulty in understanding the text.

First, not being equipped with efficient reading skill, Chinese students felt frustrated and miserable in fulfilling the reading task. In addition to the foreign language, the lack of reading skills (e.g. scanning, skimming, etc.) also leads to the reading difficulty. Chinese interviewees realized that they often read in a very slow manner, and sometimes failed to catch up the average speed or unable to finish the reading task. It is also important to notice that if they could not finish reading the materials on time, they later could not fully participate in the discussion. Similar to international students studying in English-speaking countries often requiring extra time to read their text books (Lin & Yi, 1997), Chinese students studying in Germany reported that they had invested much more time than their German counterparts in reading. Cammish (1997) vividly depicted hard-working students sometimes "plod doggedly through complete books, carefully looking up every unknown word in a dictionary" (p.153) and further suggested international students attend study skill course which delivers skim and scan skill.

It is important to point out that German lecturers pointed out Chinese students often depended too much on their electronic dictionary:

I noticed that as long as identifying a new word in the reading materials, Chinese students immediately searched it in their electronic dictionary and write the meaning in Chinese. Their electronic dictionary becomes their crutches. Actually, electronic dictionary both helps them and hinders their reading. (Lecturer 1, 5-5)

Since Chinese students didn't realize this, none Chinese students mentioned this point in the interview.

Second, the reading material is difficult. In addition to the reading skill and German language, the academic-based knowledge leads to the problem. For example, one Chinese (Wan_MA) student majoring in media science reported that some of her courses concern knowledge of philosophy. Another Chinese student major in German language and literature similarly mentioned that she had to read anthropology, philosophy, and culture (Yang_MA). Facing this problem, some Chinese students had to invest more time (Yang_MA), while others turned to the secondary literature/ source for help.

When encountering difficulty in reading materials, some Chinese students neither make effort in understanding the text themselves nor ask others, but searching for the secondary literature on internet. Often, the secondary literature uses easier words to explain the original theory. Some students choose to read secondary literature to understand the text. (Qian_MA, 68-70)

In short-term, the strategy of reading secondary literature/ source helped the Chinese students to understand the original text; nevertheless, such dependence on secondary source does not solve the problem in the long run. They might obtain the general idea of the text, but their knowledge and reading skills has not been improved. In this case, a reading course teaching necessary skill will benefit Chinese students.

In addition, lecturers in Study 2 also pointed out Chinese students have difficulty in understanding the text in a deep way.

Chinese students, as well as some German students, seem to be very satisfied with themselves, when they are able to understand the text. However, they cannot further discuss about the reading materials. This is related to the “conceptualization”. Let me cite an example, if I show you a table, on which lays the bread, coffee, jams, cheese, etc. Then, I will ask you, what is it? Chinese students probably will repeat the items on the table (bread, coffee, jams, cheese, etc.), while German students might say “breakfast”. German students have already learned such “conceptualization” at schools. (Lecturer 1, 5-5)

Indeed, the understanding of the text in a deep way depends on the good command of the German language proficiency, which is an advanced-level. Therefore, to attend some reading courses will gradually improve Chinese students reading skill.

Writing. Academic writing is the output of one’s academic opinion or understanding. The difficulty of writing for Chinese students is closely related to three aspects: (1) the academic writing skill, (2) German language proficiency, and (3) some rules of writing, e.g. how to cite correctly. Similar results indicated that Chinese students demonstrate different capability as their Western counterparts in organizing essays in English

(Mohan & Lo, 1985). In the interviews, two Chinese students specified their difficulties in writing:

One professor once criticized me with rage, as he found that I cited some information from Wikipedia. [...] No one told me how to cite correctly. And I cited the content of the original text unintentionally. I felt misunderstood as how to cite correctly is “totally new” to me (Jia_MA, 145-145)

The above experience indicated one difficulty in academic writing: *plagiarism*. Plagiarism is one writing problem that Chinese students come across. Cammish (1997) suggested two reasons lead to international students commit plagiarism: (i) plagiarism was not regarded as a sin in some countries, instead, it was considered as an academic practice to summarize what others have said into a shorter version; (ii) international students used the original text in order to avoid making mistakes in the foreign language. Based on the interview, most Chinese students actually had no intention to commit plagiarism, but they were not equipped with academic writing skill.

Another experience is shared by one Chinese student writing the semester paper. She realized the difficulty resulting from lacking German language skill and the specific knowledge of her academic discipline:

To write these 25 pages (of semester paper), I felt very depressed and miserable every day, as I didn't have a clue how to write it. Although this writing task is merely an exercise and we don't get any score, I still applied my mind to do it, as I know this paper is a rehearsal of the master thesis. (Jing_MA, 90-90)

At that period of time, she experienced too much pressure and spent too much time in writing this paper. She tried to read more books related this topic and to better understand the theme. In the interview, she felt grateful that the lecturer showed understanding and put off the deadline several times.

Furthermore, the academic writing style varies between universities. In the interview, one German lecturer shared his own overseas experience as a student in the US and a young scholar in France respectively.

When I was young, I was always a straight-A student in Germany. After finishing my Magister degree at a German university, I went to the US to pursue a Master's degree. To my great surprise, the first semester in the US I got two “C”s for the semester papers. All of a sudden, I realized: “somehow, things are different here”. I had been always proud of my penetrating analysis in these two semester papers, while my American supervisor seemed to be just annoyed at it. He questioned me “Why haven't you written the paper concerning the theme? Why do you necessarily have

to clarify the author's concept of language?" Obviously, this is uninteresting to him at all. I realized the "correct" American expression and argumentation is culture-specific and sometimes academic discipline-specific. The second experience happened in France, when I was doing my "Habilitation"²³¹. I wrote the text in French. The comment I got from the first version was "You can't write it in this way. This is absolutely the 'Teutonic Wagner-style'. One cannot read and digest the text." In terms of the academic writing, the French "Esprit" style is highly valued. Until then, I was aware of the different style in these three countries: in the US, one's strength is based on reading a large amount of articles; in Germany, the ability of arguing the basis of knowledge/ theory in a penetrating way is appreciated; while in France, the elegant expression is highly valued. (Lecturer 1, 17-17)

Obviously, the above experience shared by the German lecturer stimulates the further discussion about academic writing. To international students, to write an academic paper well is more than the application of writing something in a foreign language, but it is based on the understanding of the academic expectation of a certain academic discipline at a higher education institutional level. In addition to the good command of German language proficiency, Chinese students also have to get familiar with the expectation of academic writing at German universities.

Attending academic assessment

Exam is an assessment intended to measure students' knowledge. Forms of academic assessment in China and Germany are not identical. In Germany, students register the time for attending examinations, as long as they feel ready; while in China it is common that students attend the examination at the end of the semester. Moreover, the form of examination in Germany is often composed of both written (in German *schriftlichen Prüfung*) and oral exam (in German *mündlichen Prüfung*). In the field of social science, the form of term paper (in German *Hausarbeit*) is common. In China, written exam is the main form of assessment.

Because of the difference, Chinese students reported that they were very nervous in attending the exams, as they had no ideas how it worked. Here are two examples:

I was really nervous when I attended the exam for the first time. [...] I could have achieved a better score, but I was just simply too nervous. [...] But after attending the exam and knowing how it worked, I don't feel nervous any more. (Chen_MA, 97-97)

²³¹ Habilitation is a "postdoctoral qualification showing ability to lecture and do research at professorial level" (Quinlivan, 2009, p.76). It is a qualification at a higher level than the degree of doctor in Germany and other European countries.

I was very nervous, as many written exams in our faculty last only one hour, and very few exams last 1.5-2 hours. That's a new custom of exam to me and I just worried that I wouldn't finish it. But I got 1.0 at the first exam. Since then, I had the feeling that I can handle it and no longer felt that nervous. (Ting_MA, 39-40)

In general, Chinese students reported that the examination in Germany was more demanding. For instance:

The exam at a German university is indeed difficult than that in China. If one doesn't understand it, he won't obtain a good score. (Fan_Graduate, 139-139)

Considering the difficulty of the examination, Chinese students adopted various strategies for preparing the exam. Some invested more time for preparing for the exam in advance, some settled the “safety factor”, and others prepared the exam with a buddy.

Before the exam, I spent much time in preparing for the exam. In addition, I set the “safety factor”: if the course was very difficult, I would set the goal to achieve a 2.0²³²; even I didn't perform well in the exams, I would at least achieve a 3.0. Some students aimed at having a 4.0 at the very beginning, it often turned out that they failed it. It is normal that if one fails for the first time and he feels stressful at the second try. Because of having set the “safety factor”, the result of the exam was normally within my expectation. (Fan_Graduate, 58-61)

I often prepare for the exam at the library with some Chinese students attending the same exam. (Pang_MA, 228-229)

Interviewees indicated that Chinese students were good at writing exams but have some difficulty in the oral exams, as oral exams enquires spontaneous answers and a good command of language proficiency. When Chinese students had difficulty in expressing knowledge they had known in German language, they either used English or drew the diagram at the oral exam to help them conveyed their knowledge on this topic.

Some professors asked me “do you prefer to use English or German?” I first used the German, but during the exam, as long as I could not express myself well in German, I would turn to use English [...] at the oral exam, I even tried to draw the graph, so as to make myself understood. (Pang_MA, 135-135)

²³² In German universities a 1 (very good) to 5 (failed) grading scale is used (Law school has its own grading system).

5.3.2 Affective-dimension: feeling at a loss and feeling misunderstood

In perceiving the difficulty in the cognitive-dimension, Chinese students feel at a loss and stressful. As in the initial phase, Chinese students have not identified the support system at the university, which leaves them the illusion “no one takes care of me”.

Feeling at a loss: a state of bewilderment

Facing the discrepancy concerning the arrangement of courses in China and Germany at the beginning of the semester, Chinese students reported “feeling at a loss” or “losing the orientation”. As discussed earlier, almost everything in the German system is new to them: how one arranges the courses (the number of courses one takes each semester), gets familiar with forms of courses (lecturers, seminar and exercise), fulfills the academic tasks (reading, writing and doing practical projects), and attends the new forms of exams (oral and written exams). They were overwhelmed by a large amount of information all of a sudden. Because of differences between German and Chinese universities, Chinese students lost the academic orientation and academic support system.

First, Chinese students lost the orientation organizing the syllabus.

I had been informed of the forms of courses at German universities when I was in China. But when I started studying in Germany, I realized it was another story! I didn't know how the Modul-System or the AGNES²³³ worked, nor did I have any idea of the Modulabschlussprüfung. I felt at a loss. (Wan_MA, 32-33)

I was at sea the first semester. The first step was to decide what courses and how many of them I should take. I really lost orientation: I haven't chosen any course by myself in China, as we received a syllabus and everything had been arranged for us. [...] I read the Vorlesungsverzeichnis (course catalog), but I still had no idea. I understand that our faculty has given us much freedom in choosing the courses, but to me, it was a big challenge. (Jing_MA, 23-23)

Second, because of the language difficulty, they were also at a loss in attending courses. Chinese students felt frustrated when they fail to understand the content.

The lecturer spoke very fast. When the German students were discussing something, I could do nothing, but just kept silent there, which made me feel frustrated. (Fang_BA, 16-18)

²³³ AGNES is the online course catalogue of her university.

I was really at a loss at the beginning. [...] I didn't know what the key point was and what I should pay attention to at class. Frankly, this is very frustrating. (Jing_MA, 32-32)

Third, Chinese students feel “without supervision”. One important impression that frequently mentioned by Chinese students at the very beginning of their study is: *No one is in charge of me* (in Chinese 没人管我 or *meiren guan wo*). This is due to the different administration structure between Chinese and German universities. For example, one interviewee (Wan_MA) compared the administration of the typical Chinese university to “kindergarten”, as everything is arranged by the faculty.

One big character of studying in Germany is: no one looks after you. [...] Several Chinese students I know were totally at a loss at the first semester: they didn't know how to organize the Modul-System and when they should take certain courses. [...] I shared their experience as well. At the beginning, I was all at sea at class. (Chen_MA, 39-39; 91-91)

In China, the faculty organizes the course schedule for students. One just attends the class according to the course schedule. In addition, the teacher calls the roll; therefore, students have to “show up” at the lectures. Here nobody takes care of the presence. (Pang_MA, 100-100)

The university in China, to some extent, is similar to a “kindergarten”: everything is organized for students. One just follows the course schedule and attends the classes. If one plays truant, the class teacher will contact him. In Germany, one has to arrange everything by himself. (Wan_MA, 49-49)

At the beginning of the first semester, I felt like a fish out of water. The concept of “university” in Germany is very abstract. The lecturer doesn't look after you. (Rong_MA, 62-62)

Such sense of loss is due to the different student-supervision system between Chinese and German universities. In China, the structure of student-supervision is strict. At the faculty-level, there is a “class-teacher” (in Chinese 班主任 or *banzhuren*) who takes care of students' study and daily life; at the student-level, there is a “monitor” (in Chinese 班长 or *banzhang*): a student who plays the role of taking care of his/her peer students in the same class (in Chinese 班级 or *banji*). When they suddenly “landed in” the German universities, such expectation of similar supervision was not fulfilled, which leads to the impression of “nobody takes care of me”.

In the meantime, it is important to mention that at the beginning, they haven't established their academic support system yet; hence, they often felt helpless and mentioned "no one helps me" and indicated that they had to face everything by themselves.

At Chinese universities, the concepts "the class", "the class-teacher", and "the monitor" are available. As long as one has a question, he can turn to class-teacher or the monitor for help; nevertheless, at German universities, the autonomy of students is highly valued – there is no class-teacher or monitor; German students grow up in such system, therefore, their competence of adjustment is much stronger than us Chinese students. (Jing_MA, 32-32)

I didn't know how to turn to others for help and did everything by myself the first semester [...] Facing the difficulty in learning, I thought that I should make more effort; while I didn't know that I could have also asked others for help. (Lee_MA, 120-120)

The lecturer and the tutor can only help you to explain the question, but it is YOU who has to understand the knowledge. Nobody else can do that. (Pang_MA, 169-169)

Studying in Germany is an independent learning experience, as nobody helps me. Especially that I am now writing my doctoral thesis in the field of law, which is a totally independent academic work. One meets the supervisor very seldom. [...] Others are not in your shoes; therefore, they don't know your problem and cannot help you: when I was writing my doctoral thesis, my supervisor also didn't know my situation very well. (Sun_PhD, 183-183)

At the very beginning, I felt quite empty, as nobody supported me; I can only rely on myself [...] no matter learning the German language or finding an internship. [...] I just have the feeling that I have to deal with everything by myself. (Zhang_MA, 331-337)

Feeling misunderstood

Facing the new challenge in the initial phase, many Chinese students felt frustrated and stressful; they expected that their lecturers would have shown understanding to them (as international students); in the meantime, they found that their lecturers hadn't understood them, which made them feel misunderstood (in Chinese 委屈 or *weiqu*). Following are some examples:

Situation 1: lecturer-student communication at class. It is suggested that Chinese students were more likely to encounter some frustrating experiences, if their lecturers having few or no experiences with Chinese students before (Zhu, 2007). In the interview, the impression that some lecturers didn't show understanding and sympathy to their international student identity also frustrates Chinese students.

Some lecturers didn't teach me much, as I appeared to be silent at class. I have the feeling that these lecturers just ignore me, I guess they hold: "if this student doesn't show any initiative and behaves so passively at class, why should I teach him?" Because of that, the effect of such courses was terrible. *I felt misunderstood: as an international student, I do encounter more difficulty (than the native students): because of that, I expected more academic support and understandings from the lecturer.* Of course, I also met other teachers who showed much patience to me and provided much instruction; I felt motivated and tried my best to live up to their support. (Zhao_MA, 100-100)

At class, if we failed to answer one question raised by the lecturer, the lecture would question us unsatisfactorily: "why don't you participate in the discussion as other students?" I felt misunderstood, as the lecturer could not understand: we actually did participate in the discussion, but we need more time to understand the question and think about how to answer it in German language. But some lecturers just could not understand us. (Rong_MA, 34-34)

Situation 2: lecturer-student communication during office hour. Once at lecturer's office, one Chinese student wrangled over a disputed point with the lecturer. The lecturer meant that the Chinese student should have come to the office hour earlier.

I was also impetuous at that moment and shouted, 'I just SIMPLY don't understand what office hour is in Germany. We just SIMPLY don't have it in China and this is SIMPLY new to me. You can't expect us to know everything as German students do, because they know the system ever since their childhood. That's not fair.' [...] If I have been informed what office hour looks like or how it functions, I will also try my best to follow the suggestion of the lecturers. [...] But all these stuff is what I don't know before. I just feel rather misunderstood. (Jia_MA, 147-149)

There is another story of the office hour: one Chinese student wanted to talk with the professor. She went to the professor's office and didn't realize that it was not his office hour. The assistant told her that the professor was at a meeting; moreover, it was not his office hour. The Chinese student told the assistant that she had something in urgent and further asked when the meeting ended. The assistant turned out to be angry and said

“You don’t have any appointment with the professor and it is impolite of you to ask his agenda”. In hearing this, the Chinese student shared her feeling:

All of a sudden, I realized that this is totally a new academic system. I had the feeling that I was an unexpected guest. [...] At that moment, I really felt guilty. Since then, I become careful in dealing with the office hour: to make sure that I didn’t interrupt anyone. This experience leaves me a deep impression. (Jing_MA, 76-76)

The concept of *office hour* (in German *Sprechstunde*) is one of the brand new academic resources to Chinese students. In China, professors and lecturers are normally available at office: as long as they don’t have any teaching task. Hence, their office hour will not be specifically noticed. In Germany, however, professors and lecturer are only available at office for a certain period of time within the week. Some professors require students first to make an appointment with them (by Email or to contact his secretary) or if the number of students coming to the office hour is big, each student has limited time (10-15 minutes) for the talk.

One interviewee (Zhang_MA) shared her experience with the tutor. She once asked the tutor to provide suggestions concerning the organization of the studies and the tutor patiently offered the suggestion. This positive experience left her a good impression and encouraged this Chinese student later consulted him for further help. Once, after the German language course, she went to him with other five Chinese students. Surprisingly, the tutor drove them away with a rage and said angrily that they should make appointment in advance instead of comeing with so many other Chinese students. This incident hurts the Chinese students’ feeling and they decided to never ask him anymore.

Situation 3: At excursion. In the case study, the faculty once organized an excursion to Czech and students had the task to work as group and explored the theme “fashion” there. Considering the large number of Chinese students in this faculty, lecturers deliberately assigned Chinese students to different groups, so that there was no single group only composed of Chinese students: the purpose was to encourage intercultural communication among group members. To lecturers’ great surprise and disappointment, in Czech, Chinese students automatically reunited and stayed together throughout the excursion. Back to Germany, the lecturer flew into a rage and questioned Chinese students “Why did you just stay only with Chinese students? I am really sad”. In the case study, one Chinese student mentioned this excursion experience and said “I just don’t understand why our lecturer was so sad, when we Chinese students stayed together?” (Jia_MA, 164-164).

Obviously, from German lecturers’ side, it was miserable to see their good will of promoting the intercultural communication between Chinese students and students from other nations turned out to be in vain. Nevertheless, from the Chinese students’

perspective, they hadn't been well informed of the meaning of such excursion, therefore they regarded the excursion more as a trip/tour. They felt misunderstood as they found that the lecturer was not satisfied with their performance:

It is because I didn't know the aim and rules [of excursion] before, and most of the Chinese students regarded the excursion as a trip. If I had been informed it earlier, I wouldn't stay with the fellow Chinese students. [...] In the meantime, our lecturer just took it for granted that we Chinese students should have known the concept of "excursion" as well. [...] Unfortunately, we just didn't know what excursion meant. [...] No one had explicitly informed us that we should always stay with our group, which is the rule that German students do at the excursion. (Jia_MA, 164-180)

Stress

Researcher suggested that stress was at its height at the beginning of the academic sojourn (Brown & Holloway, 2008). Yan and Berliner (2009) pointed out that culture and education disparities between China and the host country, foreign language deficiencies, ineffective interactions with faculty members of the host country, and high motivations to achieve cause Chinese students' stress studying in a foreign country. In interviews, Chinese students mentioned that heavy workload, personal concerns, and communication with peer German students were three main stressors.

First, heavy (academic) workload. The introduction of Bachelor-Master-System in Germany encourages students to manage the study in a relative short period of time (bachelor for 6 semesters and masters for 4 semesters). On the one hand, this requires students in Germany to finish the study in an efficient way; on the other hand, the new system also brings much pressure to them.

In the first semester, I was under pressure and felt depressed, as I have to attend many courses, presentations, and projects. I am now wondering how I survived under the pressure at that time. [Interviewer: why did you choose so many courses?] Because the course takes place only in summer semester, if I didn't attend it this semester, I had to wait for one year. (Lee_MA, 76-76; 85-85)

I attended seven courses in the second semester. I often studied in the library until 11 or 12 o'clock in the midnight. (Jing_MA, 32-32)

Preparing for the seminar is a lot of work. I have to prepare not only for the content of the whole seminar, but also for the questions raised by other students at class. It was tiring. (Ting_MA, 120-120)

In addition, not every student in the interview expressed that they experienced much stress. For example, one exchange student (Fang_BA) mentioned that she didn't have to take many courses and reported less stress.

Encountering the pressure, some students held an open attitude towards the stress and regarded it as a motivation.

Studying in Germany is my own choice, after careful consideration. I like my current subject, and I am not forced by anyone else to study well. I do find the subject interesting. (Rong_MA, 60-60)

Since my motivation of studying in Germany is to find the difference between Chinese and German education. The challenge, to some extent, is exciting to me. If everything is same here in Germany as in China, or I encounter no challenges, why shall I come to Germany? (Lee_MA, 10-10)

Others hold the attitude "take things as they come" and settle down to solve the difficulty.

When I look back to the previous learning experience in Germany, nothing was really difficult, no matter the study or the life. [...] Although I admit that sometimes the task was annoying, as long as one was patient, he would manage it. (Fan_Graduate, 48-51)

Second, personal concerns become a big stressor. In addition to the academic pressure, the hope and expectation from parents and friends in China exert pressure on Chinese students' study in Germany. Compared with the length of study in the US, the UK, or Australia, it takes relative longer time to achieve an academic degree in Germany (in addition, some students spend approximately 10-12 months studying German language in Germany before getting registered in the German universities). Nevertheless, parents and friends in China are not well informed of the current situation in Germany. They compare the length of studying in Germany with that in Anglo-Saxon countries and question their children why it takes them that longer.

All of my relatives and friends know that I am now in Germany. I am under the pressure that I should not fail the study or finish the study too slowly. Otherwise, it is a big shame. (Pang_MA, 168-169)

Many (relatives or friends in China) keep on asking me: "why haven't you graduated yet? When will you finish the study then?" At the beginning, all these questions make me upset and nervous. (Wan_MA, 45-45)

Frankly, the pressure from my parents is bigger than that of study. My mom could not understand, why those Chinese students spending the similar

length of time in the UK have achieved doctoral title already, but I was still struggling with my master's program. (Chen_MA, 19-19)

Among the interviewees, only one Chinese student (Jing_MA) mentioned that she didn't receive much pressure from her parents, as her father had been to Germany for several times and he was familiar with the length of study in Germany.

Furthermore, since the majority of interviewees are self-funded students, who obtain financial support from their parent, they regarded it as a burden to their parents. One Chinese idiom goes “百善孝为先” (in English: Among all kinds of kindness, filial piety goes first). The young Chinese have the responsibility to be financially independent, as a young adult, one should find a job after graduation and take care of his parents.

I am already 26 now, and this is an age that one should be financially independent and take care of his parents. But I still receive financial support from my parents. This makes me feel guilty. [...] I have some pressure to finish the study as soon as possible. (Lee_MA, 162-163)

5.3.3 Behavioral-dimension: making effort (strategies and result)

Results indicate that, facing the difficulty in the initial phase, Chinese students invest more time on study after class and continue German language learning to deal with the problem that they met in the beginning of adjustment.

Making efforts to understand the courses

As discussed earlier, Chinese students have problems in understanding the content of lecturers in the first semester. Facing this problem, Chinese students used various strategies, i.e. taking down notes, raising questions after class, and self-learning at leisure time.

Taking notes at class. To engineering or natural science majors, taking notes is a useful method to supplement the knowledge that they fail to understand on the spot, as the formulas or figures written by lecturers on the blackboard are important resources.

In the beginning, I could not understand the lecturer. I just took down the notes, which helped me to understand what the lecturer said at class. [...] Lecturers often write down a lot of formulas on blackboard. If one doesn't understand what the lecturer said, it is important for him to understand the formula. Later he can try to figure it out at home. (Pang_MA, 108-115)

The same strategy might not work well to students majoring in social science, as it is impossible for lecturers to write every main point on the blackboard or in *PowerPoint* (PPT) slides. To Chinese students majoring in social science, the note-taking strategy works only when they have the learning materials at class. In some cases, the lecturers do not prepare any slides of PowerPoint at all.

Our lecturers don't show any PPT slide. Only at seminar, some students will show some PPT slides when doing presentations. (Wan_MA, 33-33)

I have tried recording the lecture, but the quality of the recording was not so good. In the meantime, I didn't have so much time to listen all the contents again. So the only way to deal with the problem (not understanding the content) is to read more books concerning the topic after class. (Jing_MA, 52-52)

To Chinese students, as well as other international students in Germany, the information written or shared by lecturers at class is most important, since they have difficulty in understanding and digesting the knowledge immediately, due to their limited German language. The learning materials serve as another opportunity to understand the knowledge after class. At the beginning, such assistance is extremely important for Chinese students. Sometimes, lecturers share the teaching materials (e.g. PPT slides they have shown) online²³⁴, so that students can later review them after class.

Raising questions after class. Another strategy adopted by Chinese students to deal with the difficulty in understanding the lecture is to ask lecturer questions immediately after class. Although lecturers leave some time for answering students' question shortly before the end of lectures, Chinese students, some German students as well, prefer to raise questions after lectures. This strategy is a "comfortable" method for Chinese students to deal with the difficulty. First, interviewees (Lee_MA and Jing_MA) mentioned asking questions after class was a common practice in China. Second, solving the difficulties directly after class also avoided the trouble of going to the office hour (waiting in line or the "embarrassment" of a "face to face" situation), which is interpreted as "less risk of loss of face" by Cortazzi and Jin (1996).

I never raise any question at class or go to the office hour. Instead, I ask lecturers questions after class. [...]Although I have to admit that I could not immediately understand the lecturer's explanation, his answer helps me a lot: as it provides me with some clues so that I can go over the note after class. (Pang_MA, 124-127; 184-193)

²³⁴ For example, "Moodle" System (<http://moodle.hu-berlin.de/>) at the Humboldt University of Berlin provides lecturers and students with an online platform for sharing learning materials (PowerPoint slides, reading materials, etc.) and for discussion (e.g., group work and projects).

Self-learning after class. Chinese students regarded the difficulty is caused by German language. Therefore, they first turned to the Chinese version of text books for help. The effect of reading text books in Chinese language varies: some regarded the books or learning materials in Chinese as very helpful; while others reported that they were disappointed in finding that the content in Chinese version was as difficult as in German version.

I searched the text book in Chinese. First I read the Chinese version; in the meantime, I reviewed the examples referred by lecturers at class. [...] The Chinese version helps me to form a concept, which is helpful; but sometimes the translated version is not as good as the original one. (Pang_MA, 97-99)

I was so excited to find the book 'Of Grammatology' (by Derrida) in Chinese version, but later I found that I even could not understand it in my mother tongue. That is really frustrating. (Wan_MA, 33-33)

Facing the language challenge, Chinese students are expected to invest more time in learning than their German counterparts. Nevertheless, surveys indicated that, compared with German (36 hours per week) and international students (36.5 hours per week) from other countries (Isserstedt & Kandulla, 2010), Chinese students spend less time (31.5 hours per week) in learning (Mao, 2010). One possible reason is that some of them have some part-time job to struggle to make ends meet. At the interviews, some Chinese commented that they were diligent studying at the library alone or learn together with Chinese students (Pang_MA, 214-215).

Keeping on learning German language

As mentioned earlier, Chinese students pointed out that German language become a big challenge for them in learning in Germany. It is important to see how they made effort to prove their language proficiency. Results of interview and questionnaire indicated that Chinese students did realize the importance of learning German language, and improved German language proficiency by attending language courses, finding a language partner or learning the language themselves.

Chinese students were aware of the importance of the German language. They realized that passing standard German language test was far from enough.

Law is a subject that requires a good command of the German language. I realized that and kept on learning German ever since I began studying in Germany. (Sun_PhD, 80-83)

I attended the German courses provided by the language centre of our university. It is imperative for me to continue the language learning in the first year: especially the courses for grammar and academic writing. (Ying_MA, 27-28)

RWTH Aachen provides free advanced German course. After passing the DSH, I kept on attending this course and it was helpful. (Fan_Graduate, 111-111)

Two doctoral (Wu_PhD and Yin_PhD) students who hadn't learned any German in China attended German courses the first semester in Germany. Although their working language is English, they gradually found it was necessary for daily communication.

In addition, they attended language courses, found a language partner and/or learn the language by him/herself.

Language course. Language courses provide professional and systemic language instruction. Currently, both on-campus and off-campus German courses are available. A large amount of German universities have established language centers (in German: Sprachenzentrum), and provide both German courses for international students and other foreign language trainings for all the students.²³⁵ Some universities provide international students with free German courses. Furthermore, private language schools or further-/ adult- education institutions offer German courses as well. Comparing with the private language school, German language courses offered by the university are relative cheap. Therefore, only very few Chinese students (Pang_MA and Cao_MA) indicated that it was because of the fee that they didn't attend the course.

In addition, some participants were not satisfied with the language course offered by the university. For an example, one student (Lee_MA) registered a course, aiming at practicing oral German; nevertheless, she was disappointed, as the lecturer, instead of delivering spoken language skills, simply asked participants of the courses to prepare for a presentation. Another student (Jing_MA) mentioned she took two German language courses: one comprehensive course and one grammatical course. However, she was not satisfied with the teaching method of the course and didn't finish the courses.

²³⁵ At the orientation course at the first semester, many interviewees were informed of the possibility of learning German language provided by language centre.

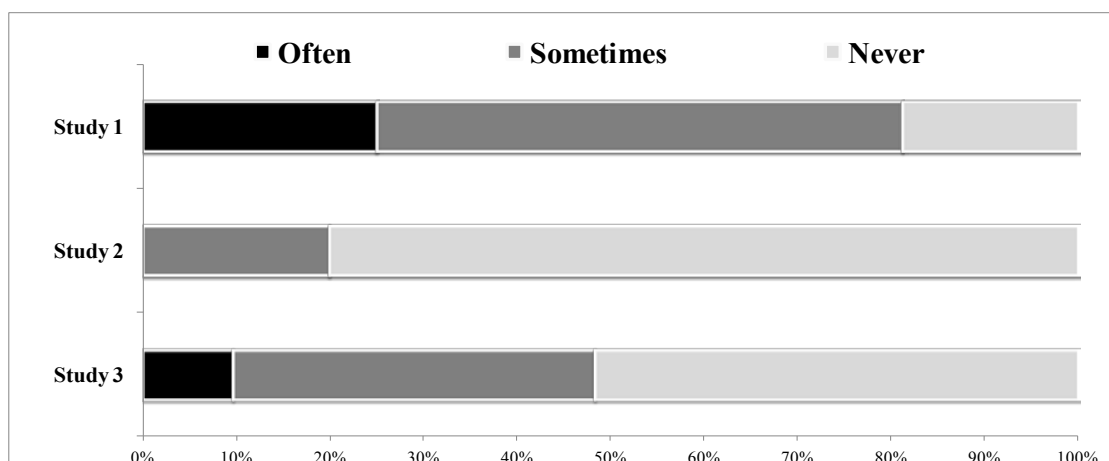


Figure 5-10: Frequency of attending further German language training in Germany

Figure 5-10 demonstrates the percentage of Chinese students who continued the German language course in all three studies. Results of the Study 1 indicated that thirteen out of sixteen interviewees (81.3%) had attended further German courses in Germany; and four participants took German courses for a long period of time. Even Chinese students attending international Master's program and doctoral students attended German language courses. Study 2 is a special case, as all participants are German majors. Because of their previous language background, it is not difficult to imagine the relative low percentage of attending German courses; Chinese students in Study 2 indicated that reading and writing course was more helpful to them. Results in Study 3 demonstrated that more than half (51.6%) of the participants of this research had never attended any language courses at their first year in Germany. Thirty-nine percent of Chinese chose to improve their current German language by "occasionally" attending German language courses; only 9.7% "often" attended German courses. If we combine the results of the three studies, we might find more than half of Chinese students (53.7%) attended German courses.

Finding a language partner. It is significant to point out that everyone has his or her own method of learning a foreign language. In this case, attending German language course is not necessarily the best option to improve German language skill. For instance, one interactive way of learning German language is to find a language partner. Compared with language course, learning German language through communicating is informal and relaxed: one plays the role as both "learner" and "teacher".

I benefit a lot from the interaction with my language partner. We meet each other very often. She is actually my classmates and we have many chances to communicate with each other. (Lee_MA, 147-152)

I have a language partner. [...] We meet each other regularly: once a week and each time for two hours. [...] She helps me to correct my emails and dictation. It is really helpful. (Zhang_MA, 183-202)

When one has a language partner, he learns not only the German language, but also the German culture, custom and convention. (Jing_MA, 62-62)

Self-learning. Those students who didn't attend language course or have no language partner chose to learn the language by themselves. They would read novels (mentioned by Pang_MA), watch films or TV (mentioned by Wan_MA), or talk with flatmate (Qian_MA) in German to prove the language skill. Nevertheless, they reported that such kind of self-learning was not very helpful.

5.3.4 Conclusions: initial phase as a hard landing

Arriving in Germany, Chinese students are immediately exposed to the new academic and cultural milieu. Interviewees reported some interesting challenges. From then on, the "battle" of academic adjustment in the host country starts, as Anderson (1994) stated "adaptation begins when the sojourner acknowledges the obstacle situation and decides on a consistent strategy of instrumental solutions" (p.314). Many interviewees described their experience at the current phase as "at a loss" or "feeling lost", as they have difficulty in adjusting to the Modul-System, in organizing the curriculum planning, and in acquainting themselves with the forms of the courses and fulfilling specific tasks. Chinese students in the UK also regarded the initial phase of adjustment as "unfamiliarity and frustration" (Zhao, 2007, p.100).

First, Chinese students' hurried preparation in the pre-departure phase results in the "hard landing" in the initial phase. To many Chinese students, without good preparation, the shock caused by the rapid transition from China to Germany can be compared as a "hard landing" to the German learning environment. The result of the above analysis indicates Chinese students encounter some difficulties in the new learning environment the first semester. Since their preparation is more daily life-oriented and their knowledge about German universities are based on "second-hand information": instead of searching for information from the university homepage (which provides important information for international students or freshman), they depend much on personal experience shared by other Chinese students in Germany. As a result, facing the Modul-System and new types of courses at German universities, they meet some difficulty in organizing their own learning plan or fulfilling the academic tasks such as making a presentation and group work. Similar results were reported by Liu (2001) that Asian students encountered difficulty when forced to give presentation, participate in group activities, or ask questions.

Furthermore, interviewees indicated that their current German language proficiency prevents them from quickly getting familiar with the learning environment: in terms of attending the orientation courses (as they failed to understand the content), various types of courses (lectures, seminars, exercise classes) and fulfilling the academic task

(understanding lectures, participating in the discussion of seminars and writing). Even Chinese students having German language background admitted encountering much difficulty in reading and writing.

Second, there is no immediate and smooth switch from Chinese learning environment to the German one. The optimal option for Chinese students studying in Germany is, as long as they register at German universities, they switch the internal education concept from “studying at Chinese universities” to “studying at German universities”, so that they can quickly adjust to the requirement of German universities. Nevertheless, this is not realistic at all, as students are simply not machines. Based on the discussion of their adjustment in the initial phase, we notice that the switch from “studying at Chinese universities” to “studying at German universities” is all of a sudden.

Based on the results of interviews, Chinese and German universities have both similarities and differences in the organization of the curriculum, types of courses offered, types of academic tasks, forms of assessment, the lecturer-student and student-student relationship, etc. (see Table 5-10)²³⁶.

Table 5-10: Difference at Chinese and German universities

	Studying at Chinese universities	Studying at German universities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Organization of curriculum ▪ Progress/speed of finishing the study ▪ Types of courses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Syllabus designed by faculty ▪ Decided mainly by faculty ▪ Mainly courses are lectures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “Modul” designed by students ▪ Decided mainly by students ▪ A combination of different types of courses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Types of academic tasks ▪ Types/ Forms of assessment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ More individual work ▪ Written Exam / semester-paper (oral exam in very few cases) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Individual & group work ▪ Written / semester-paper & oral exam
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lecturer-student relationship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ at-class interaction: teacher-oriented ▪ off-class interaction: after class/ at office hour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ at-class interaction: student-oriented ▪ off-class interaction: at office hour
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Student-student relationship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “classmate”, “roommate”, and “friend” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ peer student visiting the same course

Note: table is compiled by the author, based on the interviews.

In the initial phase of the academic adjustment, Chinese students begin to be exposed to the German learning environment and meet some bitter incidents initiated by the difference between China and Germany. To some students, this is a frustrating and discouraging phase. In the meantime, Chinese students often judge the learning experience based on the perspective of “studying at Chinese universities”, which is quite deeply ingrained in their “mind map” of Chinese students. Chinese students begin their academic journey in Germany with all the concept and rules they had learned in China. As Cortazzi and Jin (1997) clearly stated that Chinese students “not only carry cultural behaviour and concepts into the classroom, but also use the specific framework to their cultures to interpret and assess other peoples’ words, actions, and academic

²³⁶ Explanation about the comparison will be introduced in the following text.

performance” (p.77-78). Although it is true that Chinese students hold an open attitude (as they are motivated to study abroad and hold an attitude of “take things as they come”) to the new learning environment, it is still difficult for them to fully understand the logic and intention behind the academic requirement in Germany. It takes them some time to get familiar with the new learning milieu and realize the requirement, before they gradually find their own ways to turn the inner button from “studying in China” to “studying in Germany”. Before that, many Chinese students “adopt their original academic identities” (Zhao, 2007, p.105).

Third, the academic support system has not been established. Transferring from China to Germany, Chinese students need time to identify and establish support system in the new learning environment; nevertheless, the results of this research indicated that Chinese students were not yet familiar with the support system in Germany. Hence, they felt helpless in dealing with the difficulty alone. Zhou (2010) reported that 20% Chinese students in Germany reported that they hadn’t obtained any help from others. Similar results indicate that very few Chinese, as well as other East Asian students, search for advisory service in Germany (Zeilinger, 2006). Furthermore, the result of the interviews similarly indicated, in the initial phase, Chinese students didn’t benefited much from the academic communication with lecturers or peer students; they felt lonely and at a loss when they met difficulties. Previous experience in China has a strong influence on Chinese students’ mindset: traditionally, Chinese culture regards “standing on one’s own feet (in Chinese 自力更生 or *ziligengsheng*)”. Facing the difficulty, they believed that “God helps those who help themselves” (in Chinese 天道酬勤 or *tiandaouchouqin*); therefore, they preferred to solve it by themselves or turn to their co-national Chinese friends in Germany for help.

Fourth, in spite of the challenges and problems in the initial phase, Chinese students make efforts and adopt strategies to get adjusted to the study in Germany. (1) It is significant to point out that in spite of the shock at the hard-landing during the first phase, by and large, Chinese students reported that they were still excited to compare and identify the similarities and difference between the two systems. For example: one Chinese student (Ying_MA, 17-18) mentioned that: “Although I realized the academic pressure, I remembered that I was excited and curious about my study at the beginning of the first semester”. In addition, most respondents were confident of attending the examination, as they have had much experience in writing exams in China. (2) The majority of Chinese students are making efforts to deal with the difficulty: they consult academic staff (by asking lecturers or tutors questions) or fellow students, solve the academic difficulty alone (by investing more time at leisure time), or show initiative in improving German language (by attending German courses or finding a language partner). (3) Some Chinese students were satisfied with their academic performance; others admitted that they should have worked harder. For instance, one student mentioned that “I am satisfied with my academic performance the first two semesters. [...] Learning at German universities depends on one’s self-discipline. [...] I tried to

follow the tempo of the whole class” (Rong_MA, 59-60). Another student commented on her performance “This is my first semester and I still need some time to get familiar with the environment in Germany. I will make more efforts next semester (Yang_MA, 220-220)”.

Last, but not the least, it is worth noting that in addition to getting familiar with the new learning setting in Germany, they also need to settle down into daily life in Germany the first semester: searching for an accommodation, getting to know the public transportation, and getting familiar with the climate and food. Although it is true that such difficulty in daily life is short-term-oriented; such issue has an influence on their academic studies as well. For example, searching for an accommodation is the biggest concern to many Chinese.²³⁷ One Chinese student mentioned that “before finding a room, I just could not concentrate on my study at all” (Jing_MA, 80-80). In the meantime, it is significant to point out that peer freshmen (German students who transfer from secondary schools to the university) from the host country encounter similar challenge the first semester (Barker et al., 1991, Bochner, 1972; Evans, Carlin, & Potts, 2009; Sovic, 2009; Turner, 2002). Nevertheless, compared with native students, international students did report a lower subjective well-being at the beginning of the academic program (Van Oudenhoven & Van der Zee, 2002). All in all, in spite of the difficulty in getting familiar with the new learning environment, the experience in this phase lies in the cornerstone for the further process of academic adjustment.

5.4 Developing phase: negotiating with the difference between China and Germany

After experiencing the “hard-landing” in the initial phase, Chinese students gradually get familiar with the learning requirement in the developing phase; in the meantime, they achieved progress in German language. Nevertheless, in the developing phase, Chinese students often struggle between the balance of fulfilling academic expectation in Germany and maintaining their previous learning habit/ learning tradition in China. Thus, in the current phase, they “live an academic life filled with paradoxes” (Campbell & Li, 2007, p.389) and encounter the challenge of mediating the difference between learning in China and learning in Germany.

²³⁷ In China, every university student obtains an accommodation at the campus.

5.4.1 Precondition of further academic adjustment

One important precondition for the further adjustment in the developing phase is the improvement of the German language and the increased knowledge about German universities.

Progress in German language

Progress achieved in German language facilitates Chinese students' academic adjustment. The results of the longitudinal research indicated that after two semesters, namely, from the beginning of the first semester (Phase I) to the end of the second semester (Phase II), Chinese students made progress in German language (see Table 5-11). Based on the self-assessment, Chinese students reported progress in writing ($t=-2.12$, $p<0.05$), reading ($t=-2.25$, $p<0.05$) and listening ($t=-2.82$, $p<0.05$). Although they reported some progress in speaking and communication, the results between Phase I and Phase II are not statistically significant.

Table 5-11: Progress of academic German language skill according to Study 3

Academic German language	Phase I		Phase II		N	t
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Listening: Understanding the lectures	2.73	.88	3.36	.85	22	-2.85*
Speaking: Participating in the discussion at class	2.27	1.08	2.50	1.01	22	-.89
Reading: Academic reading	3.27	.77	3.68	.95	22	-2.25*
Writing: Homework	3.43	.87	3.86	1.06	21	-2.12*
Comprehensive: Communicating with German lecturer and students	3.05	.92	3.19	.75	21	-.68

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Note: Chinese students were asked to assess their academic German language level by using a 5-point Likert scale: 1(very bad) to 5 (very good).

Furthermore, based on self-assessment, Chinese students' communication ability with German lecturers and students is closely related to their German listening ($r=0.50$, $p<0.05$) and speaking ($r=.51$, $p<0.05$) skills. This result is in accordance with Volet's (1999a) assertion that CHC learners generally have low participation in tutorial discussion. Not only the result questionnaire, but also the interview proved that Chinese students made some progress in the German language after two semesters:

Since we haven't attended any German language test afterwards, it is not easy to judge my progress of my language progress objectively. In spite of that, I feel that compared with my language proficiency one year ago, I do make much more progress in reading (the speed of reading), academic writing, and communication. The progress takes time. (Rong_MA, 60-60)

Second, daily German language: similarly, Chinese students have achieved progress in daily language as well. Table 5-12 indicates, except for the item of “speaking”, Chinese students achieved progress in reading newspaper and magazines ($t=-2.44$, $p<0.05$), writing daily post ($t=-3.18$, $p<0.01$), and understanding the daily communication ($t=-2.45$, $p<0.05$).

Table 5-12: Progress of daily German language skill according to Study 3

Daily German language	Phase I		Phase II		N	t
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Listening:						
Understanding the daily communication	2.73	1.05	3.20	.93	30	-2.45*
Speaking:						
Expressing oneself at daily communication	2.77	1.25	3.07	1.02	30	-1.51
Reading:						
Reading newspaper and magazines	2.63	1.00	3.07	.91	30	-2.44*
Writing:						
Writing daily posts and materials	2.80	1.30	3.30	1.24	30	-3.18**

***. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).*

Note: Chinese students were asked to assess their daily German language level by using a 5-point Likert scale: 1(very bad) to 5 (very good).

The above results indicate that Chinese students have made much progress in listening and writing after two semesters in Germany, while they achieved little improvement in the area of speaking and comprehensive communication with German lecturers and fellow students, in terms of academic and daily-communication based situation.

Getting familiar with the German universities

The results of longitudinal research (Study 3) indicate: compared with the knowledge about German universities at the beginning of the first semester (Phase I), Chinese students reported that they had more knowledge about the academic activities at the German universities at the end of the second semester (Phase II) (see Table 5-13). After two semesters, about half of the Chinese students in the Study 3 regarded their knowledge about German university as “very good or good”.

Table 5-13: Progress of knowledge about German universities according to Study 3

Knowledge about German universities	Phase I		Phase II		N	t
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Types of courses	2.71	.94	3.52	.926	31	-4.05***
Examinations	2.68	.95	3.52	1.03	31	-4.25***
Academic tasks	2.39	.92	3.87	.99	31	-8.92***
Academic resources	2.55	.96	3.58	.77	31	-4.69***

****. Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level (2-tailed).*

Note: Chinese students were asked to assess their knowledge about German universities by using a 5-point Likert scale: 1(very bad) to 5 (very good).

The results of the paired samples T-Test between Phase I and Phase II indicate that, at the end of the second semester²³⁸, their knowledge about the academic task is significantly better than that of the beginning of the first semester ($t= 8.92$, $p<0.001$). Similarly, their knowledge about examinations ($t=4.25$, $p<0.001$), academic resources ($t= 4.69$, $p<0.001$), and types of course ($t=4.05$, $p<0.001$) increased significantly.

Chinese students in Study 1 also indicated they understood clearly how the system worked in Germany after two semesters, and they had more confidence in arranging the process of their study. They know it better: how many courses they should take, based on the self-assessment.

After one semester, I finally got to know how to select courses at the German university. [...] The experience of the first semester is not being too greedy and choosing too many courses; but in the second semester, one should be braver and take more courses. Especially at the beginning of the semester, one should first have a look as many courses as possible and then decide which course to choose. One accumulates the experience in each semester and things are getting better and better. (Jing_MA, 48-48)

Until the second semester, I had the feeling that I was “on the right track” and know the “pattern” (when should I exert more effort for preparing the exam, when can I take a break and get relaxed during the semester). It takes some Chinese students only one month to get to know the pattern; while it takes others much longer: as some Chinese students are extroverted and they get the information immediately by asking others; while others are introverted, shy and hesitate to ask others for help. (Chen_MA, 91-91)

5.4.2 Cognitive-dimension: negotiating between “studying in China” to “studying in Germany”

In the developing phase, one difficulty Chinese students encountering at German universities is how to negotiate between the former educational believe in China and the current expectation in Germany: whether one should reserve his opinion or raise his opinion at class? One phrase Chinese students often mentioned at interviews are “being cheeky” (in Chinese 脸皮厚 or *lianpi hou*) and “thin-skinned” (in Chinese 爱面子 or *ai mianzi*).

²³⁸ Note: since thirty-one students among the 55 students (who attended the first round of the questionnaire) continued the second round of the longitudinal research, the results of pairs-comparison is based on the 31 students who answered both rounds of questionnaires.

Negotiation 1: To reserve one's opinion or raise one's opinion at class?

Perspective	to reserve one's opinion at class		to raise one's opinion at class
in China	☹ ▪ to show respect when others talk; ▪ deliberate thinking is expected	↔	☹ ▪ to show off; ▪ to interrupt the lecturer & other students
in Germany	☹ passive/ silent / low engagement	↔	☺ active participation

First, Chinese students attributed the silence at class to the learning tradition in China. Traditionally, especially at primary and secondary schools, during the class, Chinese students are expected to either answer teachers' question or keep quiet at class. Growing up in such learning tradition, Chinese students believe that asking questions or raising their opinion is an interruption at class: which "waste other students' time or sidetrack teacher talk" (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996, p.197). Interviewees reported that reserving opinion at class was a "habit", "tradition", "custom" or "inertia" (in Chinese 习惯 or *xiguan*) that they had picked up in the Chinese class. Although they realized that such custom didn't prevail over German universities, they still felt "embarrassed", "shy" or "uncomfortable" to ask questions or raise opinions at class.

In China, we regard interrupting lecturers at class as impolite, thus we seldom ask questions at class [...] unless I was asked to raise my opinion by the lecturer, I won't disrupt him. (Cao_MA, 147-148)

At the very beginning, I find it embarrassing to raise my opinion at class. This is partly a habit we have developed in China. I was too shy and just raised opinions twice or three times in the whole semesters. (Ting_MA, 85-94)

We Chinese students are very accustomed to the tradition of listening to the teacher at class, and never "fight" with others to raise our opinion. (Cao_MA, 129-129)

The active atmosphere at class has much to do with the democracy as well. For example, the communication between lecturers and students is very free, and one doesn't have too much consideration about "尊师重道" (in English: respecting the teacher and his teachings), and you can "interrupt" the lecturer if it is necessary. (Lee_MA, 168-168)

In addition, Chinese students hold the belief of "惜字如金" (in English *treasuring one's words*) or "沉默是金" (in English *silence is gold*) at class: if one speaks, one should "一鸣惊人" (in English *to amaze the world with a single brilliant feat*) or raise one's opinion after "深思熟虑" (in English *deliberate thinking*). Chinese students have the mentality: "asking questions is one thing [...] and asking high-quality questions is

another” (Liu, 2002, p.41). One Chinese student further referred international students from other countries often actively mentioning “simple knowledge”, which was to her not worth repeating at all (Ting_MA, 85-94). In the meantime, many interviewees (e.g. Cao_MA, Wang_MA, and Ying_MA) noticed that their German peers and international from other countries were active, and hold a neutral attitude toward it. This is not consistent with another finding in the UK, as Chinese students there hold negative attitude toward their peer British students’ active participation (Zhao, 2007, p.105).

I noticed that other students were really active at class. Most of them were born and grow up in the western system. Such strong will of expressing oneself at class is an inborn ability. (Cao_MA, 129-129)

Second, German lecturers pointed out that the language skill also plays an important role: those students with better German language proficiency performed more actively at class.

Of course, engagement at class depends on Chinese students’ language proficiency. [...] I have the impression that those (Chinese students) who have better German language proficiency are more active in involving the discussion at class. (Lecturer 2, 7-7)

Negotiation 2: To respect the authority or express one’s own opinion

Perspective	to respect the authority		to express one’s own opinion
in China	☺ asking lecturers for advice	↔	☹ opinionated/ self-centered
in Germany	☹ dependent, or having no definite views of one’s own	↔	☺ being critical and think independently

In China, students are expected to show respect to teachers and value teachers’ instruction (in Chinese 尊师重道 or *zunshizhongdao*). A “good student” (in Chinese 好学生 or *haoxuesheng*) will fulfill the task according to his lecturer’s advice and respect authority’s idea. In Germany, however, students are encouraged to form their own opinions and being critical to the theory.

For example, when writing a semester paper, Chinese students first ask their lecturers for advice; while those who fulfill the academic task without consulting lecturers are sometimes regarded as self-centered (in Chinese 自以为是 or *ziyiweishi*). Interviewees shared their experience in China and their observation in Germany respectively:

In China, before doing a presentation, we first ask lecturers for advice. They give us some suggestions. By following such advice, we can be sure that we are on the right track. If we don’t ask the lecturers, they will probably think that we don’t respect them. [...] The situation is totally

different in Germany. If one asks the lecturers' opinion at the office hour without having his own idea, the lecturer would feel strange: "why the student comes to me with an empty mind?" Look, there is a big difference in thinking between China and Germany. (Jia_MA, 29-31)

Education in China has been much influenced by the Confucianism. [...] We first would like to know how others think about it; while here one's own opinion is highly valued. (Lee_MA, 167-170)

One lecturer points out this specific problem of Chinese students in the interviews:

I notice that Chinese students believe in authority: they trust what the books and teachers say, while never doubt whether the source are true or not. (Lecturer 2, 9-9)

In German lecturer's perspective, Chinese students have a tendency of receiving to the knowledge they receive and seldom question its truth or validity. Nevertheless, such "obedience" is regarded as positive in China, where students view their teacher as "a model of authoritative learning, expert knowledge and skills, and moral behaviour, and should have an answer to learners' questions" (Jin & Cortazzi, 2006, p.10).

Negotiation 3: to ask lecturers questions or not

Perspective	not to ask question		to ask question
in China	☺ ▪ One understands what the lecturer says at class: he is smart; ▪ One can figure out the problem by himself: he is capable.	↔	☹ ▪ One is not clever to catch up lecturer immediately: he is slow/not smart
in Germany	☹ ▪ One doesn't think much about certain knowledge; therefore, he has nothing to ask.	↔	☺ ▪ One learns the knowledge by asking and discussing.

In the developing phase of the academic adjustment, Chinese students were getting familiar with the German universities. However, take the office hour as an example, it is indicated that very few Chinese students in the interviews have asked lecturers questions at the office hour.

In China, asking lecturers question means one is not as clever as other students to catch up certain knowledge immediately at class; therefore, students are not willing to show their weakness. Chinese students in the interview indicated that they preferred investing

more time to solve the problems alone after class or ask their peer students to asking teachers. Chinese students tend to ask the lecturer at office hour as a last resort (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996); by contrast, many western students regard raising questions as “a clear heuristic function (If you don’t ask you won’t know) and are often welcomed by teachers as discussion-promoting devices” (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996, p.196).

As mentioned previously that Chinese students would prefer to ask lecturers questions after class in the initial phase, gradually, some interviewees began to identify its disadvantage. They realized that their questions can be best answered by lecturers at the office hour. Two interviewees mentioned that lecturers did not have much time for answering questions (Cao_MA) or became impatient (Yang_MA) in answering the question after class, which made Chinese students realize that it is better to go to office hour. In addition, students began to identify that asking lecturers was more effective than asking fellow students (Jing_MA, 68-68). Moreover, Chinese students gradually realized that in Germany, if they didn’t take the initiative, their lecturers would never first come to them. Here are three examples:

German lecturers welcome those students who “have thick skin”²³⁹. Lecturers will give good advice and suggestion, only when students come to them and ask. If one waits that lecturers come to him and offer help like the situation in China, he will probably get disappointed – no, this (that lecturers come to students first) will never happen in Germany, especially at the doctoral-level study. (Sun_PhD, 117-117)

My impression is: German lecturers won’t take initiative and come to you. But as long as you ask him, he will help you. [...] I think the lecturers here are very friendly. [...] But anyway, they are TEACHERs. One still shows the respect to them and only talks them when necessary. (Wan_MA, 55-55)

To me, the secret of communicating with lecturers in Germany is – (students) taking the initiative. The door of the lecturer is open (at office hour). One can go to him and ask questions. (Lee_MA, 111-111)

It is worth noting that instead of complaining “nobody takes care of me” in the initial phase, Chinese students gradually realized “the lecturers are available but we have to take the initiative to ask” and they were aware: it was not “lose the face”, if one takes the initiative; instead, they “win the face” in the long run.

²³⁹ He indicated those students who keep on asking lecturers questions, without worrying about showing their weakness/ignorance to their lecturers.

Negotiation 4: to learn individually or with a group

In Germany, learning in a form of teamwork or group work is highly valued. Teamwork emphasizes intensive communication and group discussion among the members of the group. And members of the group are expected to contribute time, inputs, and new ideas to the group. In China, although students also learn together, the form of group work or doing a project together is still not common (especially at the bachelor's level); as a result, some Chinese students are not familiar with the group work. Furthermore, group work is a complicated learning form to Chinese students: it covers the application of the mastery of German language, intercultural communication skills and the academic knowledge. Based on these two reasons, only one-third of Chinese students regarded group work as “good or very good” (Zhou, 2010, p.116).

In the developing phase, Chinese students began to notice that they had little academic communication with fellow students. For example, instead of emphasizing German language in the initial phase, one Chinese student in the interview pointed out that lacking academic communication with peer students was the biggest problem for her and recognized the importance of communicating with peer students:

The biggest problem was the communication with peer students. [...] Learning knowledge is based on academic communication, which expands my horizons of knowledge. Because of the poor German language and introverted personality, I have little communication with my classmate.
(Zhao_MA, 126-126)

She further compared the pros and cons of individual and group work:

If one does the designing-project²⁴⁰ alone, on the one side, he can implement his own idea and obtain more experience; on the other side, he has to deal with a great amount of work alone. That is tiring and he often worries about whether he manages the work on time. [...] Nevertheless, when one works with others, he will get feedback and support from his team member. For example, the team member will point out the mistake which he can't identify by himself. One learns new things and makes progress by learning with others. However, one might sometimes have an unreliable or irresponsible teammate, who will definitely make the preparation more complicated. [...] Every coin has two sides. (Zhao_MA, 82-94; 114-120, 123-124; 126-126)

In addition, some Chinese students worried their identities as foreign students would tie the group down (in Chinese 拖累 or *tuolei*). Taking the fact that member of the group sharing the note, they held the idea “I should not drag the others down with me” or

²⁴⁰ She majors in architecture, which attaches great importance to the practical work such as designing.

“hinder other members” (mentioned by Wan_MA, 53-53). Other Chinese students were sometimes too sensitive and regarded the offer of other students as “sympathy” (in Chinese 同情 or *tongqing*), which hurts their self-esteem and pride (in Chinese 自尊心 or *zizunxin*).

When working together with German students, it is better to say that they “mentor” or “coach” me than to say that we cooperate with each other. I don’t want to drag others down with me. If German students want to work together with you, they won’t bother to lead you. And neither do I want to beg them to let me join them: even though I have to make more effort when working alone. (Zhao_MA, 82-84)

5.4.3 Affective-dimension: feeling confused and frustrated

Based on the analysis of cognitive-dimension, Chinese students are aware of expectation and the standard of “a good student” at German universities; however, their “prior educational experiences and different sets of cultural values, beliefs, and learning conceptualizations” (Campbell & Li, 2007, p.389) make them feel confused; they hesitate and wander between the two learning environment.

One important signal that Chinese students conveyed in the developing phase is they are in a dilemma in the negotiation. Taylor (1994) held that “[...] each person comes to the intercultural experience with former critical events in his or her life, personal goals, varying amounts of intercultural training, and previous intercultural experience that influence the learning process” (p.160). The conflict between two learning cultures is a big challenge to international students (Lin & Yi, 1997). What they once regarding as correct in China turns out to be wrong in Germany (e.g. reserving questions in China Vs raise questions in Germany). This is particularly stressful and discouraging, as facing the requirement in the new learning milieu, they need to leave their “cultural comfort zone” (Kingston & Forland, 2008, p.211). Encountering such dilemma, some researchers found that Chinese students either take a “middle” way (Durkin, 2008) or adopt a “cultural synergy” strategy (Jin, 1992; Jin & Cortazzi, 1997-98).

First, Chinese students feel frustrated in dealing with the difference of expectation between their old and new learning environment. It is quite frustrating for them to find what they always regarding “correct” in the Chinese learning environment turn out to be “wrong” at German universities. The above four pairs of negotiations (reserving one’s opinion or raise one’s opinion at class; respecting the authority or expressing one’s own opinion; asking questions or not; and individual learning or group learning) are examples to demonstrate such frustration and confusion. Yan and Berliner’s research (2009) cited one Chinese student’s experience studying in the US: “I found my low-profile personality and humble attitude, which is so valued in Chinese classroom,

has been taken by American professors as a lack of talent and an inability in many cases. This makes me feel frustrated, depressed, and stressed” (p.953).

However, it is important to mention that such difference does not only cause the frustration, some Chinese student reported a positive and open attitude toward the difference, which was important for their further development in the coming phase of adjustment.

The difference of education between China and Germany plays an active role: as the difference stimulates us to communicate with each other. [...] If everything in Germany is similar as in China, I won't have any motivation to study here. The difference is helpful. (Yang_MA, 189-192)

I am studying here to explore the difference of education between China and Germany. It will be boring if everything at German universities is same as at Chinese universities. (Lee_MA, 10-10)

Second, they also felt frustrated in finding that their lecturers could not understand them at all. In some cases, the initial difficulty in adapting to the new educational settings might also leaves instructors or tutors the impression that international student is “a poor candidate for the program that he or she has selected; or may be seen as not capable of coping with the academic demands presented” (Westwood & Barker, 1990, p.253). Chinese student in other countries also have been asked many times by various professors in the host country “how come you keep extremely silent in the seminar and never raise questions? Are you not interested in my topic or does my class bore you?” (Yan & Berliner, 2009, p.954).

Third, Chinese students felt hesitated in making a decision in the negotiation because they were afraid of losing “face” and have too many worries. For example, except for the language difficulty, they were also worried about “losing face”, which hindered them from turning to their lecturers for help. Chinese students held that “if I don't ask, the lecturers won't find that I haven't understood the certain knowledge by raising a ‘silly’ question”.

Many of us think: If I ask the lecturer a “silly” question, whether he will think that I am foolish? [...] Chinese students are shy, but this is absolutely wrong in Germany. [...] I should have had “thick skin”, had been more bravely, and had displayed great initiative to discuss research question. (Sun_PhD, 117-117; 179-179)

I remembered that when my German was still very poor, I seldom responded to those who talked with me in German. Many regarded my “ignorance” as an impolite feedback. But actually, I wanted to save my face

and I don't want to tell them that I don't understand their question at all.
(Ting_MA, 145-146)

We often have too many worries: we are foreigners here; we don't speak good German; whether I can make myself understood by lecturers? Such worries make us upset and hinder us from going to the lecturer.
(Lee_MA, 111-111)

Obviously, the “thin-skinned” attitude prevents Chinese students from bravely asking questions. Although, they did realize the “thin-skinned” attitude wouldn't solve problems at all, they were still not confident to do that, as the traditional Chinese learning tradition becomes a millstone around their neck. They still felt shy and had many misgivings or concerns about taking the initiative.

5.4.4 Behavioral-dimension: using certain strategies to dealing with the confusion

Compared with the helplessness at the initial phase, Chinese students gradually get familiar with the learning environment in Germany. The result of dealing with the negotiation between Chinese and German learning tradition varies. Some Chinese students went to lecturer's office to ask questions; some solved the problems alone (by investing more time so as to figure out the problems alone) (e.g. Zhao_MA) as they wanted to avoid the discouraging situation working with other German students; some turned to other Chinese students (Chen_MA and Zhang_MA) or ask peer German students (Zhou_MA); others tried to raise opinions in a familiar and friendly group. Interviews indicated that a friendly atmosphere encourages Chinese students to speak out their opinions. This works well especially in a small-sized group.

First, asking lecturers and German students for help. The majority of Chinese students in this research agreed that German students were helpful.

I frequently ask German students attending the same course with me. Often I will get the answer in details, as they are familiar with the context; their help is more important: when they explained the sentence to me, they interpret not only the content, but also their train of thought. Unconsciously, they also inform me the skill in reading academic text. This is the most helpful. (Qian_MA, 45-48; 49-50)

When I encounter some difficulty, I will ask German students. Most of them offer help. [...] I often ask lecturers questions after class and most of the questions will be solved. To ask question is very important. (Ying_MA, 20-24; 30-34)

Encountering difficulties, I often try to read books after class to explore the question alone; I will either ask my supervisor, his assistant or anyone who is in the same research field. The most important thing is to make efforts to solve it. (Sun_PhD, 118-119)

It depends on the situation: in terms of understanding certain knowledge, I often ask German students, whose answers are more helpful; but if I miss some notices informed by lecturers, I turn to Chinese students for help; [...] In addition, I sometimes ask lecturers questions at the office hour as well, but the office hour is too short and take places only once a week. (Yang_MA, 128-145)

Second, joining a “friendly” learning group. Chinese students chose to work with “friendly” fellow students:

I prefer to be in a small group and work with those students I already know. In such group, I am willingly to express more opinions. But if it is a big group -- for example, I once participated in a group with 10 students -- I had no chance to express my opinion at all: everyone spoke very fast; when they talked, I even not managed to catch their words. (Lee_MA, 96-96)

Some groups are filled with participants, whose attitude is open, and who equally treat anyone. In this case, I often give my opinion. But in other groups, whose members have extreme opinions and do not listen to other's voice, I often keep silent. (Cao_MA, 172-172)

At the fifth semester, I worked together with a student coming from Kazakhstan. He was a nice and friendly person. Since he has been living in Germany over ten years, he speaks good German. Through the frequent communication at the doing the project, I also made some progress in my German language. I felt so grateful that someone was trying to communicate with me. (Zhao_MA, 100-100)

This result conforms to the previous research that Chinese students participated in the group discussion more active in small group rather than in front of large group of students (Zhu, 2007).

In addition, the role of co-national Chinese students playing in the group work is worth noting. Some Chinese students, especially the first or the second semester, when doing a project together with other students, chose to draw back or followed other students' instruction passively, because they were not equipped with the necessary language skill to argue or raise their opinions in German language; while others became more confident and were ready to actively participate in the discussion.

When cooperating with a German student, I wanted to persuade him of my idea. But sometimes I just failed to express myself very well, because of my German proficiency. Or sometimes, even I spoke out my mind, I could not convince him or defense myself; as a result, I had to make a concession, carried out his plan, and realized his design. (Zhao_MA, 84-84)

Obviously, this student felt unfair that she could not persuade her partner into believing her idea because of her limited German proficiency. As a consequence of losing the “battle”, she had to carry out their German peers’ instruction and felt reluctantly to “work for them”, as German students dominated the group work. Based on this, some students are full of misgivings in the cooperation and communication with German students.

At the very beginning, I didn’t want to leave others with the impression that “she’s a very quiet Chinese”. [...] It is true that I am a foreigner here. But as other students, I have done the homework and had my own opinion as well, why should I be a small potato in the group? [...] I would like to be the player as well, instead of just a participant of the game. (Lee_MA, 89-91)

Third, modifying learning habits. Chinese students begin to do preview and prepare the lectures in advance.

One biggest modification I have made is to prepare for the class in advance. When I was in China, I did not learn actively: we just prepared for the exams, but never did any preview. Here in Germany, if one goes to lectures without any preparation, he will achieve little knowledge. I find it is embarrassing when one fails to answer the question raised by lecturer, as he does no reading in advance. One of the lecturers once said, if one wants to get a good answer, he has to first have a good question. It is important to do the preview. (Jing_MA, 80-80)

In the meantime, Chinese students prepare for the exam earlier. Having experience in participating in the exam at German universities, Chinese students realized the specific requirement of exam in Germany, and accumulated the practical experience. Hence, they were aware of the importance of preparing for the exam earlier.

To be frank, I work much harder now than I was in China. (As I was still in China,) we only reviewed the lessons intensively shortly before the exams. Such strategy sometimes works in Germany, but sometimes not. [...] I find such modification in study is effective, especially in terms of understanding the subjective-specific knowledge. (Pang_MA, 170-173)

As long as one makes effort and works hard, his performance will demonstrate his effort. Preparing the exam earlier is a good example. [...] We (Chinese students) should redouble our effort and invest much more time than peer native students. (Lee_MA, 95-101)

It takes me at least two months for preparing the exam here in Germany. [...] In China, it takes two weeks. (Chen_MA, 81-81)

I am now preparing for the presentation and exam much earlier. This makes me feel more confident of dealing with the exam. (Jing_MA, 82-82)

In addition, one interviewee (Jia_MA) also mentioned that in China, students are “expected to study by parents and teachers” (in Chinese 要我学 or *yaowoxue*); while studying in Germany is Chinese students’ own decision, they should “be motivated to learn by themselves”: (in Chinese 我要学 or *woyaoxue*). Another Chinese student held the similar opinion that “I notice that I have made progress and I enjoy the process of learning and obtain some achievement as well. I learn more active and earnestly” (Jing_MA, 82-82).

Forth, being patient and taking a step-by-step strategy (in Chinese 慢慢来 or *manman lai*). Chinese students participating in the interview realized that to get adjusted to German universities was a long-term battle, which could not be won immediately; therefore, a large amount of Chinese students first comforted themselves. By and large, most of the participants did not demonstrate anxiety or upset, as they were no longer at a loss. When they were asked their attitude towards the difficulty, they often answered “I just take the time” or “it is just a process. Things will be much easier someday”. Obviously, they analyzed their own strength and weakness, in order to develop a step by step strategy to get adjusted.

We (Chinese students) actually realize that we are very shy, but from being aware of the problem to taking actions is a long process. For instance, to raise opinion at the seminar is my weakness. Ever since the first semester, I have been thinking about how to adjust to the learning environment here better and I set a step-by-step goal: I first “forced” myself to speak up at least once at each group discussion. [And then] I upgraded the goal and “forced” myself to speak up at other situations: such as at seminar or at the presentation. (Lee_MA, 95-101)

Law is a challenging subject. [...] I first analyzed my learning method and speed of advancement, and then I asked myself, which specific course is my weakness? After the analysis, I invest more time in this course and learn it in the library. I regard this as one important factor of my success. (Ying_MA, 30-30)

One has to have the patience to spend substantial periods of time in dealing with the difficulty. For example, in our master program, there is some “killing course”²⁴¹, the course is VERY difficult and the pass rate of the exam is VERY low. [...] One has to deal with the difficulty in a step-by-step manner: at the very beginning, I could not figure out how to answer the question at all; but I solved the problem by self-learning (reading the text books) or asking tutors or other students. (Pang_MA, 162-165)

In addition to the above four modifications (asking lecturers and German students for help, joining a “friendly” learning group, modifying learning habits, and being patient and taking a step-by-step strategy), Chinese students continue the German language learning. Instead of attending German course in the initial phase, Chinese students diversified their learning methods: for example, learning the language with language partner (Sun_PhD) or self-learning (Zhang_MA)²⁴².

5.4.5 Retrospect: progress in the developing phase

By and large, Chinese students indicated that they had made progress after two semesters. The longitudinal study (Study 3) indicated, after two semesters’ studying in Germany, overall, 70% participants reported they have achieved progress and the majority of Chinese students were satisfied with their achievements (Figure 5-11). For instance, they were particularly proud of their ability of solving problems alone (80% commented the progress as “much or some progress”) and progress in the discipline-based knowledge (76.7% regarded they achieved “some or much progress”). Although Chinese students also made much progress in German language, compared with other items, they were not content with their progress in German language skill and the progress in communication.

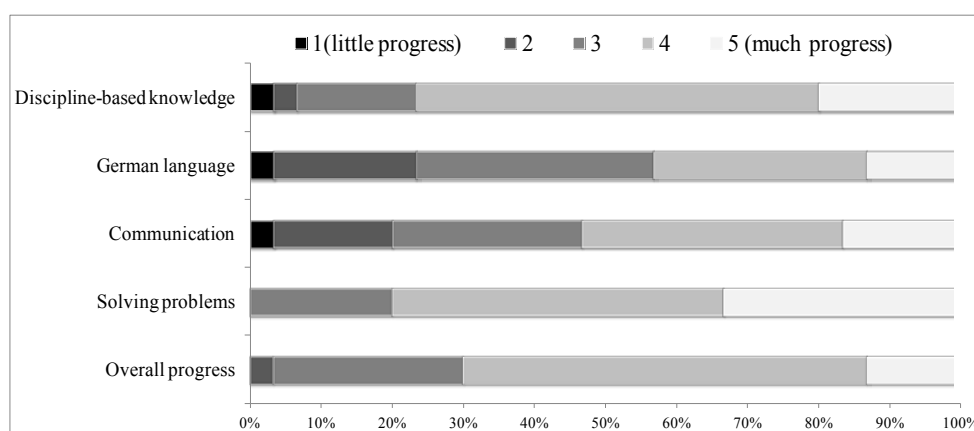


Figure 5-11: Satisfaction towards the progress according to Study 3

²⁴¹ A “killing course” is one course that a large number of students fail the exam.

²⁴² This student mentioned she learned German language by listening to the news and doing dictation.

Actually, Chinese students' progress in German language is closely related to their achievement in communication ability. Based on Chinese students' self-assessment, it indicated that their German language was significantly correlated with their communication ability $r=.45$ ($p<0.05$). It is indicated that those Chinese students who regarded bigger achievement of German language proficiency also have more confidence in communicative ability.

Table 5-14: Correlation of items of achievement according to Study 3 (N=30)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
(1) Discipline-based knowledge	1				
(2) German language	.08	1			
(3) Communication	.32	.45*	1		
(4) Problem-solving	.34	.22	.53**	1	
(5) Overall progress	.39*	.59**	.62**	.58**	1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Furthermore, overall progress is correlated with sub-progress. Overall progress is closely related to the progress of communication ($r=0.62$, $p<0.01$), German language ($r=0.59$, $p<0.01$), problem-solving ability ($r=0.58$, $p<0.01$), and discipline-based knowledge ($r=.39$, $p<0.05$). Result is consistent with the previous finding that international students reported “become more organized in managing their time for studies, committed to the course of the study, confident of using a greater range of study skills, comfortable in small-group discussion, (and) confident of managing independent studies” (Gu, Schweisfurth, & Day, 2010, p.18). Chinese students regarded studying abroad provides them with a chance for personal growth (Skyrme & White, 2011).

The results of interviews are consistent with those of the questionnaires: Chinese students were proud of their ability of dealing with the frustration or difficulties alone.

The sense of achievement lies in doing many things independently. [...] Almost every Chinese student studying in Germany shares such happiness of passing the German language tests, passing the exam, or achieving the academic degree. I would like mention something unique: after moving into a new apartment, together with another Chinese girl, I laid a wooden floor of the apartment and built the furniture alone. All this makes me feel proud. (Zhang_MA, 290-295)

When arriving in Germany on the first day, my luggage was stolen. It was a catastrophe for me, but I tried my best to calm down and thought about the solutions. [...] Misfortunes never come singly. One month after I arrived in Aachen, my bike was stolen. [...] All these are just small reverses, but they are so unforgettable experiences: how to face the difficulty alone. (Fan_Graduate, 139-139)

5.4.6 Conclusions: the battle continues

According to the results in the developing phase, Chinese students have better German language skills and are more familiar with the learning environment in Germany than the initial phase; however, at the developing phase of the journey, Chinese students have to fight negotiation between learning tradition in China and academic expectation in Germany, as they “compare and contrast the strengths and weaknesses of each educational system from their own perspectives” (Campbell & Li, 2007, p.389).

First, with the improvement of language and knowledge about the German universities, Chinese students have laid the first stone for further adjustment in the developing phase. One big difference between the initial phase and the developing one is Chinese students have made progress in German language and got familiar with German universities. The results of all three studies indicated that Chinese students become more confident of the German language. Although sometimes they still mentioned the difficulty of German language, in general, they reported the progress. The improvement of the German language makes further academic adjustment possible. In the meantime, Chinese students have been familiar with the “flow” and “procedure” in the German university semester (courses, academic tasks, exams, etc.); in general, they get a general idea of the German universities and how everything functions. Furthermore, they were aware of the support available at the universities (asking lecturers at their office hour or asking fellow students a favor) and gradually established their support network.

Second, the challenge in the developing phase is to negotiate the between the learning tradition in China and academic expectation in Germany. In the current phase, Chinese students realize that the process of academic transfer from China to Germany is not easy: they need to deal with the difference between the two learning systems. It is more than a decision either to follow the Chinese learning tradition or the German one. On the one hand, it is not realistic to expect Chinese students to behave as their German peers, they don't have the previous (primary, secondary or tertiary education) learning experience in Germany; and German language is not their mother tongue. Hence, it is simply not possible for them to do along the lines of “When in Rome, do as the Romans do”. On the other hand, it is not wise for them to only stick to all the original learning strategy or habit as they do in the Chinese education milieu, as they are expected to fulfill the academic requirement in Germany. The result of interview indicates that Chinese students are making efforts to deal with the difficulty caused by the difference.

Third, it takes Chinese students some time to transfer from “understanding the rule” to “following the rule” at German universities. In the interviews, Chinese students mentioned that they needed some time before taking initiatives to make some modification. Brown and Holloway (2008) suggested the stress induced by the academic setting slowly decreased in line with the development of international students' academic cultural competence. Still, there is much more room for progress and further academic adjustment.

5.5 Final phase: understanding/more participation in the German learning environment

Acknowledging, understanding, and then appreciating.

了解，理解，谅解

— Anonym

Approaching the end of the study in Germany, Chinese students reported that they had a relative good command of German language, showed more understanding to the feature of German universities, and learned to reflect on the study.

5.5.1 A good command of German language enables the full adjustment to the German universities

Compared with the developing phase, in the final phase of academic adjustment, the majority of Chinese students became more confident of their German language and no longer regarded German language as the biggest difficulty. For example, even two law students (Sun_PhD and Ying_MA) stated that they had no problem in understanding the lecturers. Reviewing the last seven semesters, one law student stated:

Frankly, the first semester was really difficult and painful for me: since the subject of law expects students to have a good command of German language, I had a hard time in the first semester. But now, when I read the materials of the first semester, I find it is rather easy. (Ying_MA, 37-37)

Furthermore, it is interesting to mention that in the interview, Chinese students reported that they made advancement of German language “suddenly”. For example, interviewees noticed the progress after using the language intensively on some certain occasions.

Since the fifth semester, I have been made progress in German language as well. One turning point was doing a project together with another international student who speaks good German. After the intensive communication with him, I have the feeling that I achieved much progress in listening and speaking. (Zhao_MA, 100-100)

I have been making progress in German language. But the sudden change happened in doing a project, as I did the project together with German students and had the chance to practice my German language. After the project, I achieved much experience. (Fan_Graduate, 38-39)

All of a sudden, I realized that our lecturer did not speak that fast and I could understand 90% of the lecture. Since then, my German is getting better and better. Now I can understand the entire lecture.
(Zhou_MA, 137-137)

Actually, such “sudden” progress is mainly based on the previous German learning in the past few semesters, while Chinese students might not be aware of this. The “sudden” discovery of improvement of German language makes them feel more confident.

5.5.2 Cognitive dimension: showing appreciation to the feature at German universities

At German universities, students are provided with high degree of freedom: freedom to choose discipline and institution, the study programs (classes and concentrations within the discipline), and individual paces of fulfilling the requirements (Peisert and Framhein, 1990). The initial impression of “being left alone” “nobody takes care of me”, or “without supervision” changes to the understanding of “academic freedom (in Chinese 学术自由 or *xueshu ziyou*)”. They gradually realized that they were provided with the possibility of taking the exams or began to write thesis according to their readiness and competence of specific knowledge. In the last phase of academic adjustment, a large number of interviewees indicated they understood and appreciated such academic freedom in Germany.

I think German universities suit me. I don't like the strict discipline; and at German universities, nobody chases after you or forces you to learn: everything depends on you. (Pang_MA, 234-235)

Such kind of teaching and learning style in Germany provides more freedom, which fits to those students who are self-disciplined.
(Chen_MA, 89-89)

The learning environment in Germany and China is different: lecturers provide more academic freedom to students and interaction is highly valued at class. This is the new learning experience to me. (Cao_MA, 318-319)

In addition, doctoral students agreed that they were provided with more research freedom by their supervisor as well.

He (the supervisor) never specifies what I should do, although I guess that he has a clear plan for supervising me. At the first semester, he suggested a book-list to me as he regarded it was important to have the

“commonsense”; but he did not specify what I should read. [...] It all depends on me. He encouraged me to do the research according to my research interest. (Wu_PhD, 42-45)

In the current phase, Chinese students also showed appreciation to the diversity of the courses. The Modul-System which was a brand new concept to them turned out to be meaningful and helpful; in the meantime, they pointed out some shortcomings of the courses in China.

Since the ability varies and everyone has his speed in learning, one should have his own speed. Hence, relative speaking, the education here in Germany is better: [...] The (form of) class is “dead” in China, as every student learns the same thing; while here one can design his own Modul and can choose different courses. The variety is obvious here. (Wan_MA, 49-49)

The learning form in Germany, which combines various courses together, is helpful: as every type of courses has different purpose and focus. To some extent, Chinese students in China don't have such kind of academic independence and the universities haven't provided such learning opportunity. In addition, there is little interaction between lecturers and students. (Cao_MA, 140-140)

In the interviews, Chinese students were particularly fond of “seminar” as a prevailing form of university teaching and learning. Although they had encountered many problems in participating in the discussion and doing a presentation at the seminar at the beginning of the enrolment, surprisingly, at the last phase of their adjustment, many master students indicated that they enjoyed the seminar and regarded it as a special course with German characteristics, which stimulated them to be creative and think deeply.

Attending seminar is the most important academic experience for me. (Lee_MA, 78-78)

Seminar, especially the Hauptseminar²⁴³, is the best and most meaningful learning form in Germany [...] it is a training of thinking. For example, our task at the Hauptseminar was to introduce one article from the top finance journals at the class. The purpose of the lecturer was to teach us a learning method: learning how to do a research through demonstrating research work of others. [...] It was a great deal of work and it was really exhausting [...] But after this, one learns not only how to build the structure of his own thesis, but also how to process the data. (Ting_MA, 107-144; 120-120)

²⁴³ Hauptseminar, in English: advanced seminar, especially in senior studies.

5.5.3 Affective dimension: feeling satisfied and self-confident

In the affective dimension, Chinese students feeling satisfied with their learning experience in Germany; by dealing with the difficulty, they become more self-confident in the final phase of their academic adjustment in Germany.

Feeling satisfied

Interviewees who finished or were about to finish their study were very satisfied with their academic performance. For instance, one interviewee (Zhou_MA) achieved 1.0 in his thesis²⁴⁴; others reported an average score of 1.5 or 1.6 (Zhang_MA and Fan_Graduate). Second, they were satisfied with the academic-oriented development in general. Chinese students reported that the study in Germany enabled them to broaden their horizons and to obtain knowledge in an advanced field of study.

Before I started writing my doctoral thesis, some of my colleagues have warned me that this is a difficult topic. One reason that I feel satisfied with myself is I have gradually made some progress: like digging a hole and searching for some buried treasure, step by step I have discovered something. (Wu_PhD, 106-106)

The experience of studying in Germany has widened my academic horizon: my current subject provides me with a chance to explore some subjects that I have previously little knowledge. For example, my major is English, what we have learned in China is just listening, speaking, writing, and reading. But here (in Germany), the program is very interesting and I am willingly to read more after class. (Cao_MA, 271-271)

I was awarded the “Berlin government scholarship” in 2006. [...] I feel proud of that, as only a small number of people can win that scholarship. Most of them are Germans and very few are foreigners. (Sun_PhD, 187-201)

Compared with other students, I finished the Diplom degree relative faster than others: it took me 10 semesters, while the average length of study of our major is 16.8 semesters. I did invest much time in studying.²⁴⁵ (Fan_Graduate, 20-25)

A similar result was reported by Chinese students studying in New Zealand (Campbell & Li, 2007): Chinese students, in spite of all the difficulties and hardships, indicated they had acquired adequate research and writing skills in their study, therefore, they

²⁴⁴ Here, the thesis/dissertation is the *Diplomarbeit*.

²⁴⁵ The interviewee had contributed to this fast speed of finishing the study to his previous learning experience, as he had four-year bachelor's study in China. Therefore, his previous academic knowledge was also an important reason for his success.

were proud of their academic achievement. In the meantime, they still mentioned some points of improvement. For example, they thought that they could have done better or have redoubled their efforts, so as to finish the study more quickly.

In terms of the score, I am satisfied with my performance here (in Germany) [...] nevertheless, given more time, I could have done better. All good things need time; therefore, one should not rush. (Lee_MA, 159-162)

I just have the feeling that I should have worked harder and have finished the study earlier. (Sun_PhD, 241-241)

One thing I feel regret is: I am relative slow in finishing the study, as I wasted some time in the middle of the study. I guess everyone has such period in studying abroad. Given another chance, I would have finished the study earlier. (Zhang_MA, 297-301)

One interviewee (Chen_MA) emphasized the importance of being confident of the study:

Since I passed all the exams, I have a positive mind and don't regard the study as very difficult in Germany. But if one fails one exam and later doubts his ability and has no confidence or motivation to study, he will be in a vicious circle. But one should have the confidence in himself and realize that one failure in the exam is not the end of the world. (Chen_MA, 93-93)

Feeling self-confident

Similar to other international students, who indicated “a growth in intercultural competence that carried implications for their future professional and interpersonal relationships” (Brown & Holloway, 2008, p.242), Chinese students mentioned that they obtained much personal growth, approaching the end of the study in Germany. By fulfilling various academic tasks, Chinese students obtained a sense of achievement, which makes they feel more confident of managing further academic tasks.

It is a sense of achievement when one finally makes clear the knowledge what he once didn't understand. After that, one feels: Oh, I am capable in learning and solving the problem. (Ying_MA, 39-40)

One sees the best thing in the most difficult and tiring moment. [Interviewer: what do you mean by saying “the best thing”?] I mean self-confidence: a spirit of never giving up and keeping on trying, even when facing a big challenge. (Zhao_MA_T3, 147-150)

At the very beginning, I had the feeling “I can’t manage the study in Germany”. But after passing the most difficult course, I have accumulated the self-confidence. Now whenever meeting the challenge, I will first look back the previous experience: I even passed the most difficult course, I should solve the problem this time as well. Now I hold the attitude: one should not first make the judgment “I can’t manage it”. Instead, he should just have a try. Until then, one will know, whether he can manage it or not. (Pang_MA, 223-223)

Now I am more self-confident. [...] I firmly believe that what I am doing has its own value [...] I am happy to share my opinions with others. (Lee_MA, 171-172)

This finding is consistent with Pearson-Evans’s (2006) finding that “adjustment resulted in different outcomes for different individuals, but all experience increased self-confidence and self-reliance having succeeded in meeting the challenges posed by the host environment” (p.55).

5.5.4 Behavioral dimension: participating in the academic activities

In the final phase of the academic adjustment, based on their understanding and appreciation to the learning tradition in Germany, Chinese students become more active in participating in the discussion at class and group learning, and they visit the office hour more often.

Participating in the course

Two Chinese students described their changes of from being quite to gradually participate in the courses:

Previously, I just noticed that the professor had a wide theme and talked about everything under the sun. I had the feeling: I learned nothing from him. But gradually, I realize that if I follow his thought, think together with him, and gather the courage to speak out my own view point based on my acknowledgement on this topic, I can benefit tremendously from it as well. (Rong_MA, 62-63; 64-64)

At the beginning, I was not active in participating in the discussion. But step by step, I conquer the psychological obstacles and join the discussion. The sense of achievement is great. (Cao_MA, 128-128)

Gradually, I participate in the seminar more freely, instead of feeling worried or nervous. [...] as when others ask me questions, I can understand and answer it. (Lee_MA, 79-80; 85-85)

Independent learning

In addition, Chinese students learned the independent learning through the specific experience.

Independent learning is important, [...] while it is particularly difficult for us Chinese students. Take the process of doing a presentation as an example: the lecturer suggested one theme and students do the work alone. First, one does the desk survey in the library; after having some basic knowledge in this area, one should discuss it with the lecturer and he would suggest some possible options in doing the presentation. After experiencing this process, one learns the logic and sequence of doing a presentation in Germany. In addition, one also knows why German students “appear to be relative confident in front of the audience” (as they have the experience of doing a presentation as early as in the middle school) and “do research in earnest”. This is the “rule” of doing the research here. Through this experience, I finally understand why Germany and German people are famous for their “preciseness”. (Jia_MA, 143-145)

Participating in the group learning

Facing the academic challenge in the new learning environment, international students regard academic assistance in aiding and clarifying learning as “very important” (Kingston & Forland, 2008), and they expected to receive more emotional, practical and informational support than their local student group (Ramsay, Jones, & Barker, 2007).

Instead of worrying about their presence in the group work brings disadvantage to the whole group (regarding their poor German language); some Chinese students gradually changed their opinion:

I had some working experience in China before; I know what one has learned in the university is not necessarily useful in daily work. But the competence of cooperating with others is vital; it is important to know how to solve the problem especially when the opinion within the team varies. [...] I have been making progress in cooperating with other team member. [...] I learned to listen to others' suggestion and realized that no one is perfect and everyone needs help and support from others. (Lee_MA, 84-88; 107-108; 101-101)

Obviously, some students began to appreciate the importance of group work and regarded the group work as a good opportunity to learn from each other: their initial opinions/knowledge was also supplemented. Furthermore, Chinese students became less oversensitive and were willingly to accept the help. For instance, one Chinese student felt willingly to receive the support, as she regarded the help as a supplement to her own understanding. Currently, she didn't feel that to turn to others for help makes her feel "awkward" or "embarrassed".

In addition, I've learned how to receive help from others. Actually, ever since childhood, I have been offering others help, but now in Germany, it turns out that I need help from others now. [...] In addition, I guess my classmates don't want to make me feel inferior; therefore, as long as I don't understand something, I should let them know by saying "wait, I haven't got the idea and could you please help me", instead of thinking "well, it is my fault that I don't understand it". If one needs help, he should first send a signal such as "I need help", then he will receive help. (Lee_MA, 101-107)

Realizing the importance of learning from others, she accepted the help from her classmates. She was aware that German students were helpful if she sent an "SOS" signal to them, and later will come to offer help.

One big change is that I now happily turn to others for help; while at the beginning, I prefer to do everything alone. Although I behave not so actively in the teamwork, I am willingly to work with a team. Through the communication with each other, I have been developing such ability now. (Lee_MA, 84-88)

Similar results were reported by Kingston and Forland (2008) that almost all East Asian students participating in the study indicated "enjoyed and felt comfortable with group work, as this gave them the opportunity to share ideas and develop personal ideas in a supportive environment" (p.215).

Benefiting from the office hours

First, Chinese students benefited from asking lecturers question in the office hour. They mentioned that some lecturers might not provide the specific solution to the question, but they provided some thoughts or ideas, which was more important.

When I was writing my master's thesis, I visited the lecturer in the office hour and asked for help. Although they were not that familiar with my topic, they offered some thoughts. When I asked them the question, they never told me what I should do in a detailed manner; instead, they told me that it was ME who should make the decision according to my hypothesis. I benefit from such supervision. (Ting_MA, 174-174)

Second, they learned how to better take advantage of the office hour. Chinese students realized that one should prepare the question in advance and later talk with the lecturer at office hour. They learned how to communicate with the lecturer to benefit from the instruction.

I remembered once I was at one professor's office hour and asked for his advice. During the conversation, he kept on asking me: "if you want to write the term paper, what kind of preparation you have done?", "What kind of materials you have already read?", and "What do you think about this?" Then he told me his opinion. [...] I realized what the most important was one's own point of view, although the lecturer will offer some help. [...] From then on, I will first do my homework: reading the materials and form my own idea, before going to the office hour. [...] One should never visit the lecturer in the office hour with an empty mind, as this is not appreciated in Germany at all. (Lee_MA, 112-113; 176-176)

Actually, some of the questions have more than one answer. At the office hour, the lecturer offers some reference, which helps me to form a basic concept. I no longer expect an answer can solve any question, as I do think that many questions have open space. It is not bad to learn with the question in mind. (Jing_MA, 72-72)

Visiting the lecturers at the office hour is an important opportunity for Chinese students to turn to lecturers for help. Based on the above stories, we can conclude that German lecturers are willing in offering help to Chinese students. Nevertheless, Chinese students do not know how to take advantage of it at the beginning.

According to my experience, professors in Germany will never come to you and instruct what you should do. BUT, as long as one turns to them for help, they are really friendly and helpful: no matter academic issue or language problem. (Wan_MA, 55-55)

Some of our lecturers have intercultural experience themselves and they can understand us. As long as we go to them asking for help, they are willing to offer help in terms of study or daily life. (Qian_MA, 37-39)

Knowing the function of the office hour, some Chinese students have mastered the tactics: before talking with the lecturers, they first read materials and formulate their own thoughts. Such preparation also made them become more confident of communicating with the lecturer and facilitated the efficiency of the office hour.

I hadn't visited the office hour the first semester, as I asked the question after the class. [...] The second semester, as a group, we first "did our homework", visited him in the office hour, and introduced our theme before

the presentation. I learned this method through this experience. The third semester (this semester), I know how to take advantage of the office hour and go to the office hour alone. (Lee_MA, 112-113)

One Chinese student even “dared” to argue with her lecturer, as she had read the materials required in advance and had the confidence in replying lecturer’s enquiry and question. She found that the lecturer offered useful instruction, when he noticed that she had well prepared.

This time, when I just sat down, Prof. K came straight to the point: “what have you done so far? Please let me see your work.” He had the stereotype that I had done nothing. [...] To his surprise, this time I clearly told him “I have read theory of X, Y and Z, but I feel sorry that I just could not understand it. I have even searched this theory in Chinese, trying to understand it in my mother tongue, nevertheless I failed”. After hearing that, Prof. K moderated his temper. Realizing that I have tried my best to understand the reading materials, he said “what you are reading now won’t contribute much to your presentation, [...] actually you should read the article of this author...” Although I was in the wrong track (in terms of preparing for the presentation), I won his understanding. This conversation was encouraging. (Jia_MA, 143-143)

In addition, two Chinese students were aware that it was a bad idea to go to the office hour together with other Chinese students (Jia_MA and Zhang_MA) and suggested one had better not go with a group of Chinese students.

Learning to reflect on the study

A pair of phrases that often referred by participants were “to think/reflect (in Chinese 思考 or *sikao*)”, “to use one’s head (in Chinese 动脑筋 or *dong naojin*)” and “to find it out (in Chinese 领悟 or *lingwu*)”.

(To get adjusted in a new learning environment,) in addition to invest the time and patience, one needs to reflect on his experience. [...] One should identify the strength and advantage of education in Germany and make up for the deficiency of learning. (Rong_MA, 64-65)

My reflection of the learning experience in Germany is one need “to use one’s head”. [...] To learn or understand the knowledge is one thing, but to apply the theory to the practice is another. My boyfriend [a Chinese student] shares my opinion. He studies engineering and agrees it is important to apply the knowledge learned at lectures to the practical work, for example, in the “Projekt”. This is an advanced level. (Lee_MA, 94-94; 176-176)

5.5.5 Retrospect and outlook: satisfaction, self-assessment, future plan, and recommendation

At the end of their study in Germany, Chinese students looked back to their academic achievement, personal development and growth in general, and looked forward to career prospects.

Satisfaction of the learning situation in Germany

One previous research indicated that international students' satisfaction in Germany depends on two factors: (1) their expectation and the actual offer at German universities; and (2) international students' ability and the academic requirement of the German universities (Ro, 2006). Result of questionnaire and interviews indicate that Chinese students are satisfied with their learning experience, lecturers, and academic resource.

General learning experience in Germany. Results of Study 3 indicated that about 70% participants are satisfied with their learning experience at German universities in general. Figure 5-12 indicated the result of satisfaction among 31 Chinese students who answered the question. The result of this research is consistent with Breitenbach and Danckwortt' (1961) finding in 1960s that in spite of the difficulty in study, the majority of international students (81%) were satisfied with their learning experience in Germany.

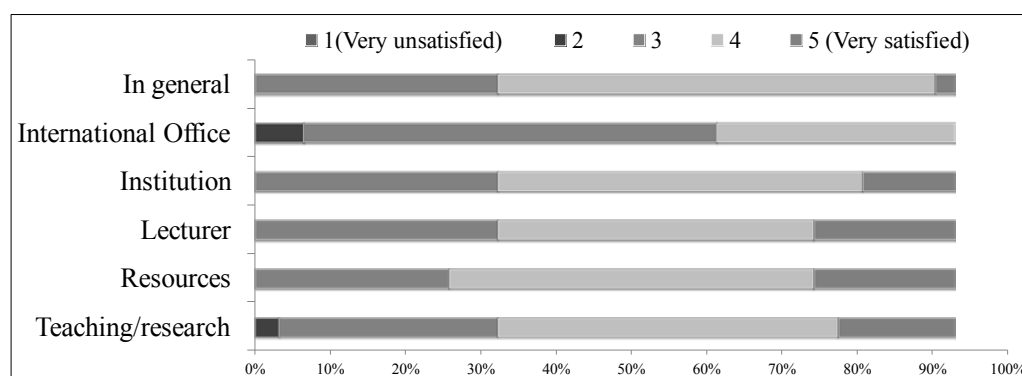


Figure 5-12: Satisfaction with the learning experience at German universities according to Study 3

International students put a premium on quality of education and lectures, programs, academic and learning environments, and academic resources (quality of libraries) highly in the host country (Campbell & Li, 2007; Chan & Drover, 1997, p.53). The questionnaire indicated that about 75% of participants reported that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the academic resources at German universities. Over two-thirds of Chinese students were satisfied or very satisfied with the teaching and research quality, lecturers, and institution respectively. Compared with these items, Chinese students were less satisfied with the service provided by the international student office. Over 38% of Chinese students were either satisfied or very satisfied with the international

student office. One possible reason is that the Chinese students didn't have much interaction with the international office, while they had expected too much from the international office. Taking this fact into consideration, it does not necessarily mean that international student office provides worse service. One interview mentioned that "I know that the international office of our university has organized many activities, I have been just too busy, or sometimes too lazy to join" (Cao_MA, 274-274).

At the interview, Chinese student reported their satisfaction with the German universities as well.

Germany is a country good for an overseas study: the situation here is different from that in the US. The academic atmosphere in Germany is more relaxed; while the competition plays a more important role in the US and researchers are under stress. In Germany, (even without such big pressure,) one still does excellent research as well. In addition, students here enjoy good service. (Zhou_MA, 244-247)

Given another chance, I would still have chose Germany. (Pang_MA, 246-247)

Lecturers/teaching quality. Chinese students are particularly satisfied with their lecturers and the teaching quality here.

I appreciate the teaching quality here. Our professors are the expert of this field (Electrical Engineering) and they provide a good answer to our question. (Pang_MA, 236-237)

I am satisfied with the teaching quality in Germany. (Cao_MA, 155-156)

Academic resources. The result of the questionnaire indicated that Chinese students were very satisfied with academic resources in Germany. Similarly, in the interviews, Chinese students also spoke highly of the infrastructure and easy access to academic resources.

One will easily identify that what professors discussed at the lectures are updated. [...] In addition, to master students there are more chances to find an internship outside the university. (Zhou_MA, 184-191)

What we have learned at German universities is always updated, as the versions of textbook or materials are frequently updated. For example, the version of the textbooks such as "Mechanical Manufacturing" or "manufacturing process" in China was outdated. (Fan_Graduate, 139-139)

One advantage of doing research here (in Germany) is the access to a large number of classic original works. They are often not available in China -- although we do have the translated version of the works in China, the quality of the translation has been influenced by the knowledge of the translator. (Wu_PhD, 128-128)

In addition, one doctoral student was satisfied with both the software and the hardware of the research environment:

The administration and organization of the laboratory is in good order. [...] first, the registration and use of the experimental facilities or equipment is well organized. [...] second, the cooperation among different departments is quite good. [...] third, the technicians at the library are professional and helpful. They have a profound understanding of his research area. Through the talk with them, I benefit a lot. (Wu_PhD, 14-14; 143-149)

Self-assessment

Previous experience of dealing with the difficulty makes Chinese students become more persistent, and they were also proud of themselves, as they were “persistent (in Chinese 坚持下来 or *jianchi xia lai*)” or had “survived (in Chinese 挺过来 or *ting guo lai*)”.

In the last seven semesters, [...] I have to admit that I did have met enormous difficulty. But I feel lucky and proud that I didn't give up and finally conquer the challenge. (Ying_MA, 39-40)

I am proud of myself that I didn't give up easily; instead, I preserve with the work in the process. It is true that I once proposed to my supervisor that I wanted to change the topic, but I still keep on trying. (Wu_PhD, 159-160)

Furthermore, Chinese students became more open to new things. The learning experience in Germany also provides Chinese students with the experience of contacting German and international students from other countries. Through the communication, they appeared to be more open.

My achievement is that I become more open. In the past, I opened half of my heart when communicating with others; while now I open all it. I can patiently listen to those opinions which are totally different from mine and become more tolerant. (Lee_MA, 171-172)

The experience of learning in Germany provides me with a wider perspective and broadens my horizons. (Cao_MA, 271-271; 358-358)

Furthermore, Chinese students indicted that they have learned the specific “German ways” of doing things, for instance, doing things in a more serious, earnest, and accurate way. Brown and Holloway (2008) also pointed out “the acquisition of culture-specific skills had also enhanced their employability, equipping them to operate in an increasingly globalized working environment” (p.243).

In China, to be frank, some of us were not so earnest about our study and we managed to pass the examination sometimes by the wit. But this doesn't work in Germany and I really do things in an earnest way. (Jia_MA, 141-141)

As long as one is in Germany, he should learn to be a man “with his feet on the ground” (in Chinese 脚踏实地 or jiaotashidi), instead of using his wit or trick (in Chinese 小聪明 or xiao congming). Tricks seldom work in Germany, as the academic criteria are settled (one has no choice but to fulfill it). (Wu_PhD, 155-156)

It is important to mention, higher education in China is “strict in admission but slack in graduation” (in Chinese 严进宽出 or *yanjinkuanchu*), while German universities adopt an “open-door enrolling” policy, which is slack in admission but strict in graduation (in Chinese 宽进严出 or *kuanjinyanchu*). Because of this, some Chinese students do not work as hard at universities as they did at middle schools; while in Germany, students have to compete for a good score

In general, the above self-assessment (academic achievement and personal growth) indicates that Chinese students are satisfied with their change and improvement at the end of the study. As Ehrenreich (2006) and Brown and Holloway (2008) hold that after conquering the academic difficulty and enduring the stress in a new life and academic setting, international students often achieved “personal development and growth”, “(inter)cultural experience” and making them more independent and increasing their confidence and coping abilities. Bochner (1981) similarly stated that “Multiculturality is associated with personal growth, the acquisition of a greater range of expressive options, and future-oriented creative work, values that are probably shared by most of mankind” (p.19).

Being treated as “international students”, instead of as “foreigners”

Some words often mentioned by interviewees are “international students (in Chinese 留学生 or *liuxuesheng*)”, “foreigners (in Chinese 外国人 or *waiguoren*)”, and “no preferential treatment (in Chinese 一视同仁 or *yishitongren*)”, which demonstrates two different attitudes or opinions: when they used the word “international student”, they strongly indicated their attitude/ awareness of their student identity and should make

effort and perform as well as their German counterparts and there was no excuse for them to be left behind. However, if the word “foreigners” was referred, they focused on their foreigners’ identity, which indicated that they were not so familiar with the local environment, and one should not expect too much from them. In this case, they expected more understanding and tolerance from others. In the meantime, one Chinese student mentioned that it was fair when they were treated equally by their lecturers.

When one studies in Germany, he should never search for an excuse like “Oh, I am a foreign student here and the reading task is just TOO difficult for me”. If one does not read the material and prepare for the exam, he will never finish the study. [...] One should think thoroughly before deciding study in Germany. One should NOT regard himself as a foreigner; instead, one should try his best. (Jia_MA, 145-145, 202-202)

One should not treat himself as a foreigner. [...] On the contrary, one should set the goal as high as German students do, and learn as hard as German student do. Only by doing this, one learns the real knowledge in Germany. (Sun_PhD, 245-251)

Obviously, it is indicated that Chinese students become more demanding to themselves. As in the initial phase of academic adjustment, they particularly put forward this attitude – to do as well as their German peers, instead, obtain some understanding, encouragement, and support from their lecturers. However, some Chinese students in the field of social science did expect that their lecturers show some understanding to their problems of written and native German language.

I do agree that lecturers ought to have the same criteria in assessing the German students and international students, in terms of judging our understanding of the necessary knowledge; nevertheless, in terms of writing and spoken German, I would expect that our lecturers show understanding to our identities as foreigners, as German is not our native language. (Rong_MA, 36-39)

In terms of the academic assessment, I would expect that the lecturer treat us equally: as such criteria will stimulate us in working hard and making progress in the fair learning environment. But one should also be realistic that Chinese students have to learn all the knowledge in a foreign language; while the German students just learn this in their mother tongue. Therefore, the study is more difficult for Chinese students here. (Qian_MA, 71-72)

Career (future) plan

Returning Chinese students are called colloquially as *haigui*, as “sea turtles” (in pinyin: *haigui*) and “returning Chinese students” (in pinyin: *haigui*) are homophone. Currently,

with the number of returning students is increasing²⁴⁶, those *haigui* (returning Chinese students) with both overseas studying and working experience are competitive in the job market;²⁴⁷ therefore, after graduation, some interviewees plan to work in Germany for some time, before returning to China (Ting_MA and Yang_MA). The question “to return or not?” depends on the following factors. First, the motivation of Chinese students: to those who just want to achieve an overseas certificate in Germany, they plan going back to China after finishing the study in Germany (Chen_MA, Pang_MA and Qian_MA). Some students plan to work in Germany for 2 or 3 years and later return to China (Zhang_MA and Cao_MA). Second, it also depends on the students’ identity. Scholarship (Yin_PhD) or exchange students (Zhou_MA and Fang_BA) are expected to return after finishing the study abroad²⁴⁸; while “free-movers” (self-funded students) have more freedom in choosing staying or going back. In addition, the current experience in Germany might also change Chinese students’ mind. For example, one Chinese student (Ting_MA) changed her mind and decided to work in Germany, as she had achieved positive working experience during her internship. Furthermore, one Chinese student who had spent 7 years in Germany agreed that he found “now it is time to go home and the time in Germany is long enough for me” (Sun_PhD, 239-239).

Recommending Germany as a hosting country

It is understandable that those who enjoy or benefit from the overseas academic and life experience will recommend others to study abroad; therefore, if one Chinese student recommends Germany as a destination to other students, it indicates that he discovers more advantages than disadvantages. Generally speaking, Chinese students participating in interviews indicated they would recommend Germany, although a few would still first recommend the US (Cao_MA and Wu_PhD). In addition, nobody dissuaded others from studying in Germany. This result is in line with another study that 94% international students studying in Germany would recommend their friends or acquaintance in the home country to study in Germany (Isserstedt & Kandulla, 2010).

I will recommend Germany, although the study here is not easy.
(Zhang_MA, 301-303)

²⁴⁶ According to the Xinhua News Agency, there have been over 818,400 Chinese students returned China between 1978 and 2011. Retrieved June 6, 2012 from http://www.gov.cn/jrzq/2012-02/11/content_2063804.htm (in Chinese)

²⁴⁷ Currently, returning overseas Chinese students have been divided into two types: the “big sea turtles” (in Chinese 大海龟 or *da haigui*) and the “small sea turtles” (in Chinese 小海龟 or *xiao haigui*). The “big sea turtles” have studied and worked abroad, while the “small sea turtles” only have studied abroad. Often, “big sea turtles” are more competitive than the “small sea turtles”, against this background, some Chinese students prefer to first work in Germany.

²⁴⁸ According to China Scholarship Council (CSC), the scholarship holders who study abroad are expected to return to China after finishing the study. For instance, for doctoral students, when return to China, they are expected first to work in China for at least two years, and then they can go abroad for doing further research or work. Retrieved January 2, 2012 from <http://www.csc.edu.cn/Zhuanti/ea81c531f9394a62b555a4f64ab716f4.shtml> (in Chinese)

I will recommend Germany – to study here is not that expensive and the teaching quality here is really high – compared with those countries which have the reputation “buying the degree” – an academic degree obtained from Germany is highly valued. (Wan_MA, 94-96)

It depends on the subjects one studies: if one majors in Mechanical Engineering or Automobile Manufacturing, Germany is definitely among the first choices. (Wan_MA, 94-96)

Suggestions for prospective students

When asked their suggestions for prospective Chinese students who want to study in Germany, Chinese students provided some suggestions according to their personal experience.

First, they suggested having a relative good command of German language. Almost every interviewee strongly recommended the prospective students to learn German language well before starting the study in Germany. They recommended that before coming to Germany (e.g. Zhao_MA, Zhang_MA, and Cao_MA), one should start learning German. One interviewee pointed out “even without a chance of practicing spoken German, one should try at least enlarging the vocabulary” (Ying_MA, 42-42). Chinese students emphasized that the preparation should start before they were in China.

Without (German) language basis, one won’t have a successful study here (in Germany). [...] I will recommend others that before starting the subject-based study, one should first learn the language well. (Sun_PhD, 245-251)

Before starting the lectures at German universities, one should first pay as much time as possible in learning the German language well. There is no short cut to success. (Fan_Graduate, 141-141)

Second, Chinese students also suggested that the consistency of the previous major in China and current major in Germany should be taken into consideration.

If one decides to study social science, he had better not change his major; at least he should have some basic knowledge about the new subject. [...] Take me as an example²⁴⁹: Since I didn’t have any knowledge about theology at all, I encounter more academic challenges in Germany. (Jing_MA, 96-96)

I majored in German Studies and got the bachelor degree in China. My first master program in Germany was about Ethnology at the LMU Munich. [...] It was an interesting subject, but one has to know the European history and

²⁴⁹ She majored in German Studies in China and currently studies “Religion and Culture” in Germany.

culture well. As a non-European and have little knowledge about it, I could not follow the program. [...] So I quitted and changed back to the major which was consistent with my previous academic ground. (Rong_MA, 6-6)

Third, it is interesting to mention, when asked opinions of recommendation, the majority of them first emphasized the characteristics of the prospective students should be taken into consideration. Interviewees turned out to be objective and cautious. Since they were experiencing or experienced the challenge of studying in Germany, they were fully aware how tough and harsh the journey of academic adjustment in Germany is; therefore, it is not surprising to see, many of them primarily emphasized the character of the future Chinese students.

If someone is introverted or gets depressed easily, I won't recommend him to study in Germany. Frankly, studying in Germany is really a tough experience. As a foreign student here, one has to experience the loneliness, pain, and cultural strangeness. It happens often that no one likes to talk to you or shows any no interest to you. Can the prospective student endure this? If not, he had better not choose Germany. [...] In addition, I won't recommend some teenagers to study abroad: they are just too young and vulnerable to experience the sudden challenge. (Sun_PhD, 256-259)

It depends on the ability of the candidate. If he is a tough man and is ready for challenge, I will recommend him to study here. Germany enjoys the good reputation of its education. (Zhao_MA, 151-152)

5.5.6 Conclusions

Bochner (1981) pointed out that on reentering, some sojourners are clearly aware of the nature of the two cultures and of the disparity between the two social systems (p.23), similarly, Chinese students also better comprehend the characteristics of Chinese education and German education, and show understanding to the difference, and indicate appreciation as well.

In the cognitive-dimension, Chinese students showed more understanding to the feature of German higher education. After experiencing the first “hard-landing” in initial phase and the dilemma of the two learning traditions between China and Germany in the developing phase, in the final phase, Chinese students could appreciate the learning tradition in Germany and made necessary changes accordingly.

In the affective-dimension, they no longer felt “being left alone at the German universities”, but began to appreciate the academic freedom. Learning and growing in China, students were accustomed to the situation of “under teachers’ supervision”. As

discussed previously, in the initial phase of academic adjustment, such “freedom” was not perceived as an opportunity, but viewed as a big problem or challenge by Chinese students. In other words, they could not understand why no one at the German campus supervised or took care of them as someone did in China. In addition, it was particularly difficult for them to obtain the support at the first semester(s), as they had not been yet familiar with the academic support system or student service. Nevertheless, through getting familiar with and later understanding the academic expectation at German universities in the developing phase, a large amount of Chinese students began to appreciate such “state of neglect” at German campus in the final phase of academic adjustment.

In the behavioral-dimension, a large amount of them modified and developed strategies to deal with the new challenge. The understanding and appreciation to the feature at German universities encourages Chinese students to participate in the classroom discussion, and ask lecturers or tutors in office hour. Furthermore, since they were familiar with the academic resources, they knew how to deal with the difficulty. They used available resources, instead of just holding the idea: if I can’t understand the lectures or discussion at seminars, I should work harder by myself to solve the problem. For example, more students began to interact and communicate with the faculty (lecturers, tutors, supervisors, or academic coordinators) and peer students.

It is significant to point out that academic adjustment in Germany does not mean that Chinese students have to abolish their original academic characteristics in order to cater to the local academic expectation. Exposed to one learning environment does not mean Chinese students have to throw away their own wealth of academic culture; instead, it is a wise practice, if one regards his own academic culture as a benchmark and compares it with the new learning experience abroad. As mentioned previously, it is not realistic for Chinese students to abandon the learning style or habit in China and simply “jump to” the German learning environment; however, the meaning of the academic adjustment is to identify the strength of the learning tradition in both countries. The results of this research indicate that the initial difficulty and challenge in Germany were regarded as opportunities for them to find the difference between China and Germany. Such process enriches their understanding/experience of both the guest and home culture. Kingston and Forland (2008) suggested “a view that has led to the idea of cultural synergy, in which both cultures are equally valued and grow and adjust together to successfully integrate and gain reciprocal benefits” (p.211).

In addition, another significant feature of this phase is: in approaching the end of their study in Germany, Chinese students have more stories and suggestions to share. They have more reflection on their learning experience in Germany. Adjustment is a process; one probably has to experience all the difficulties first, before he finally gets familiar or understands the learning culture in Germany.

5.6 Conclusion of the chapter

Survival of the fittest.

This chapter depicts a general academic adjustment process of Chinese students at German universities, namely, preparation phase, initial phase, developing phase, and final phase. In different phases, Chinese students meet various challenges in the German learning environment and need to adjust to the new requirement emotionally, cognitively and behaviorally (see Table 5-15).

In the pre-departure phase, the challenge for Chinese students is to learn the German language, apply for the university and get prepared for the trip to Germany. Most students go through the above process along with their usual study and leave a short period of time for the preparation. Thus, before going to Germany, they have little knowledge about Germany and German universities: the preparation is in a hurry.

To most Chinese students, the initial phase is the most challenging period, as they land in a new learning environment all of a sudden, and everything is new to them. Furthermore, they are not familiar with the support system at German universities.

In the developing phase, although Chinese students have made progress in German language and got familiar with the German universities, they need to deal with the conflict of learning tradition between China and Germany.

In the final phase, they reflect on their academic adjustment at German universities. Compared with the previous two phases, in the final phase, Chinese students have a much better command of German language. The understanding of strength (academic freedom and the various forms of courses) of German universities encourages Chinese students to actively participated in the interaction at class and take good advantage of the academic support. In retrospect, they feel satisfied with their academic achievement and indicate that they benefit tremendously from the intercultural learning experience at German universities.

Table 5-15: Summary of the challenge and academic adjustment

Tasks/Challenges		Cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions
Pre-departure phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Application ▪ Learning German language ▪ Preparing for the trip 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Cognitive dimension Motivation and goal ▪ Affective dimension Excited/ worried/ curious ▪ Behavior dimension Readiness (soft and hard skill)
Initial phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Organizing of study ▫ Making study plan (Modul-System) ▫ Deciding academic progress ▪ Getting familiar with types of courses ▫ Academic tasks of the courses ▫ Exams ▪ Interacting with teachers & students ▫ Taking advantage of the support ▪ German Language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Cognitive dimension Without supervision ▪ Affective dimension Feeling at a loss Feeling misunderstood ▪ Behavioral dimension Following the learning habit in China (Asking questions after class) Turning to other Chinese students for help
Developing phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Negotiation ▫ reserving one's opinion or raise one's opinion at class ▫ respecting the authority or expressing one's own opinion ▫ asking questions or not ▫ individual learning or group learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Cognitive dimension Dealing with the difference between German and Chinese learning tradition ▪ Affective dimension Feeling confused ▪ Behavioral dimension Using strategies to dealing with the confusion Modifying learning habit
Final phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reflection ▫ satisfaction ▫ self-assessment ▫ future plan ▫ recommendation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Cognitive dimension Showing appreciation and understanding ▪ Affective dimension Feeling confident and satisfied ▪ Behavioral dimension Participating in the academic activities

6. DISCUSSION, SUGGESTIONS AND REFLECTION

6.1 *Factors influencing Chinese students' academic adjustment*

The above discussion indicates that Chinese students demonstrate different degree of academic adjustment at German universities, as background, situational and personal factors together have an influence on their academic adjustment.

6.1.1 *Background factors: German language, discipline-based knowledge, terminology, and interdisciplinary knowledge*

Is the German language all to blame? In the interviews, as long as Chinese students were asked the difficulty that they had encountered in Germany, without any hesitation, they would immediately mention “the German language”. Danckwortt (1984) pointed out that insufficient German language resulted in the extension of the study, difficulty in communication and adjustment problem in social and cultural area, difficulty in understanding the terminology and interrelation in the discipline-based knowledge for international students. Like an “invisible ghost”, the barrier caused by German language accompanies Chinese students through the entire duration of their stay in Germany, although the problem was more difficult at the beginning. But is the German language all to blame for the problems of academic adjustment?

The impression of “having difficulty with the German language” is very often mixed with discipline-based knowledge and terminology. To understand the content of lectures, seminars, and other courses, Chinese students are expected to have a good command of German language, discipline-based knowledge, and the terminologies in the German language. In addition, the communication (attending courses, doing a presentation and visiting office hour) at university plays a important role as well. In this case, it is significant for us to differentiate the language difficulty from academic-based knowledge and terminology (see Figure 6-1).

General German language VS Academic discipline-based German language

There are differences between daily and academic German language, as the latter covers the terminology of a certain academic discipline. The standard German language exams do assess Chinese/international students' German language skills generally; nevertheless, Chinese students might not be familiar with the terminology in German. Based on the interviews, German language proficiency becomes obstacle of understanding the lectures, and expressing their opinions and joining the discussion at the seminar.

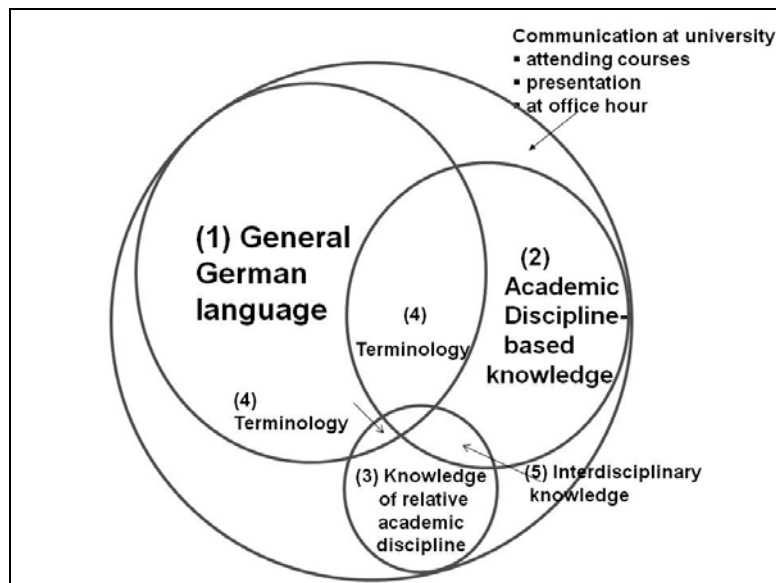


Figure 6-1: The use of academic German language at university²⁵⁰

Academic discipline-based knowledge

Many Chinese students realized that their previous academic knowledge is not good enough to meet the academic requirement.

The difficulty in understanding the lecture not only depends on the German language, but also on the problem of lacking academic discipline-based knowledge. (Wang_MA, 79-80)

Some academic text is difficult to read. Sometimes after reading one academic article for three times, I still fail to figure out the meaning. [...] There are many metaphors in the reading materials: one needs the pre-knowledge to understand it. (Qian_MA, 41-44)

In addition, it is important to mention, a large number of Chinese students pursuing a second (or postgraduate) university degree in Germany, after finishing their first degree in China; as a result, they move to an advanced level of study in Germany and their previous knowledge in the specific academic field no longer meet the new requirement. Such difficulty has relative less to do with the language proficiency, as it is also difficult to learn it in Chinese language. Furthermore, students who changed their majors stated the challenge. As mentioned earlier, two Chinese students changed their majors (Jing_MA and Rong_MA) reported more difficulties than those who have consistent major.

²⁵⁰ The “relative academic discipline” in this graph means the academic discipline which is closely related to the current major. For example, for the students majoring in economics, they also need to have a good command of mathematics.

Terminology (*Terminology = academic discipline-based knowledge + general German language*). Often, academic discipline-based terminology, theories and practice, and social-cultural knowledge of the target culture (Zhao & Bourne, 2011) will be regarded by international students as a “language problem”. It is paramount to differentiate the foreign language skills and difficulties caused by the terminologies. The knowledge conveyed at lectures is based on the professional knowledge of a specific academic field: international students met not only the challenge of German language, but also the technologies of certain discipline (Peroz, 2008; Pilcher, Cortazzi, & Jin, 2011). For example, in interviews, both law students (Sun_PhD & Ying_MA) participating in the interviews mentioned the terminology was a big challenge to them: the large number of terminologies (mentioned by Sun_PhD) and Latin language (mentioned by Ying_MA). Chinese students need basic academic discipline-based knowledge to understand the content. It is significant to differentiate the difficulty of general German language from that of academic discipline-based language. Although the German language difficulty is frequently mentioned by Chinese students, they haven’t fully differentiated the general German language from terminologies. Compared with their German counterparts, Chinese students need some time to get familiar with the terminologies. At the *Propädeutikum* or *Studienkolleg* (mentioned by Wan_MA and Chen_MA), courses offer international students such terminologies. *Propädeutikum* is a “preparatory tutorial” or “prerequisite program” (Quinlivan, 2009, p.119) for international students, while *Studienkolleg* is “preparatory college (only for students from abroad)” (Quinlivan, 2009, p.143).

Interdisciplinary knowledge = relative academic discipline + discipline-based knowledge. The “relative academic discipline” refers to the subject that closely related to one’s own major, e.g. the subject of economics requires students to have a good knowledge of mathematics. The difficulty that frequently referred by Chinese students in the interview is they lack some interdisciplinary knowledge. Both the knowledge and the terminologies concerning the interdisciplinary knowledge become a big challenge to them. For students major in social science, they mentioned that their current study involves much knowledge of other disciplines. For example, one student majoring in Media Science had to read books concerning linguistics; while the students majoring in German language were required to have knowledge about philosophy.

Knowledge/skill of using German to communicate at the university

In addition to the influence of academic-based language, the competence, knowledge, or skill of using the German language to communicate with lecturers and peer students at the university also plays an important role in the academic adjustment. The above discussion of Chinese students’ learning experience at German universities indicates that they are short of the knowledge and skill of using the German language properly to participate in the university-based communication. Often, Chinese students lack the “German language pattern/paradigm” to participate in lectures, give presentations, or

ask lectures questions at the office efficiently. What is “normal” or easy dialogue to German students seems to be a big obstacle for them. Often, an inefficient intercultural communication in the academic setting might sometimes lead to misunderstanding (Schumann, 2008). Therefore, such communication competence, knowledge, or skill is necessary for Chinese students to learn.

Gradually, more German universities establish programs to enhance international students’ intercultural communication competence in the daily academic setting. For instance, a project called MUMIS²⁵¹, which aims at enhancing the language and intercultural competence of students and lecturers at German universities, provides expressions in German language in the situation of doing an oral presentation, participating in the discussion at class, and visiting the office hour at an intercultural learning environment.

6.1.2 Situational factors: academic support, student identity, and intercultural communication with peer students

The academic support system is composed of university-wide support (orientation and language courses), faculty-wide support (academic consultation: how to organize the curriculum and examination), lecturers and tutors, and peer students attending the same courses, etc.

Academic support

Orientation course offered by university and faculty. At German universities, there are mainly two levels of orientation/introductory course (in German: Einführungskurs)²⁵² available: university-wide and institution- or faculty-wide orientation courses.

First, orientation course offered by the university-level provides general information to all newcomers, which is an important chance for freshman to get familiar with the university (such as library, computing centre, language centre, dining hall and cafeteria, advisory service, intercultural training program, etc.), types of the course, university life, etc. After introducing the general information, universities offer campus-tour or organize various events to the new students (e.g. welcome party). Some universities, in addition to the orientation course to all freshmen, offer special orientation courses to international students, which introduces information concerning international students

²⁵¹ The *MUMIS-Projekt* (Mehrsprachigkeit und Multikulturalität im Studium), supported by Volkswagen Foundation, is initiated by Universität Siegen, Universität Hamburg, and Universität Kassel. The *MUMIS-Projekt* is composed of three subprojects: (1) University-wide communication (English); (2) University-wide communication (German); and (3) Integration of international students and support for their intercultural competence (critical incidents). <http://www.mumis.uni-siegen.de/>

²⁵² Or sometimes called “orientation activities” (in German: Einführungsveranstaltung).

(e.g. German health insurance, visa, etc.²⁵³). In addition, the length of the orientation at university-level varies from university to university (some universities offer an orientation week, while others organize only an orientation-day).

Second, orientation course organized by the faculty-level, compared with university-wide orientation, delivers more information concerning the academic program. Freshman has a chance to get to know administrative and academic staff of the faculty, i.e. “Who is who” and “who is in charge of what”. In addition, important content of the orientation at institution- or faculty-level is to get familiar with the *Modul-System*. It is worthwhile to notice that the content and length of time varies from faculty to faculty. For example, some faculty organizes preparation course (mathematics) for economics students (mentioned by Ting_MA); some prepares the “orientation week” (in German: Orientierungswoche) courses (mentioned by Ting_MA), while others only manage a half a day courses (mentioned by Jing_MA).

Generally speaking, the integration week is quite helpful. The lecturers or tutors introduced the courses to us; in addition, the preparing course of mathematics is useful, which lasts for two day. (Ting_MA, 45-48)

The faculty-wide orientation course lasted about one hour, in which we are introduced to the Modul-System and how we choose the courses. We didn't receive any handout. [...] To be frank, after attending this course, I was still very confused. Although I got a general idea of the Modul-System, I did not figure out how it works. (Jing_MA, 40-40)

I attended one part of the orientation course, which focuses on the campus life, such as sport and location lectures, instead of introducing subject-specific issue. Only when some students raised the questions concerning choosing the courses, the organizer then introduced the content to us. (Chen_MA, 41-41)

In addition to the formal orientation course, some institutions or faculties organize informal events to encourage the interaction among freshman, so as to help newcomers to get to know each other and get integrated to the new learning environment. For instance, a trip to a nearby city (in German: Erstsemesterfahrt) (mentioned by Ting_MA), “Freshman-breakfast” (in German: Erstsemester-Frühstück) or “Welcome-breakfast” (in German: Begrüßungsfrühstück)²⁵⁴ (mentioned by Wan_MA) or “introducing your neighbors”²⁵⁵ (mentioned by Lee_MA).²⁵⁶ In addition, some faculties

²⁵³ Retrieved March 17, 2012 from

<http://www.studium.uni-freiburg.de/documents/international/allgemeine-dokumente-international/Orientation-Course/>

²⁵⁴ Retrieved March 17, 2012 from <http://www.student.uni->

[augsburg.de/de/fachschaften/kulturgeschichte/aktuelles/erstibegrueessung_wise11.html](http://www.student.uni-augsburg.de/de/fachschaften/kulturgeschichte/aktuelles/erstibegrueessung_wise11.html)

²⁵⁵ Unlike normal self-introduction, everyone had five minutes to introduce the one sitting next to him, which was totally new to this interviewee.

organize “orientation talk with professor”²⁵⁷ (mentioned by Jing_MA), arrange some senior students from the same country (to avoid the language problem) offering help to the newcomers (mentioned by Ting_MA); or provide courses for facilitating adjustment to the German culture (mentioned by Cao_MA).

Based on the interview, there are several problems concerning the orientation courses. First, the attendance of the orientation course among Chinese students is not high. The result of interview shows none interviewee attended both university-level and institution- or faculty-level.²⁵⁸ They didn’t know the appointment of the presentation or underestimated the importance of the orientation courses.²⁵⁹ Second, because of the insufficient German language skill, at the beginning, Chinese students failed to understand the content of the orientation course. Even one Chinese student who once majored in German Studies (in China) reported that he had difficulty in understanding the content (Wang_MA, 58-58). Third, it takes time to “digest” such a large amount of information delivered by the orientation (Ting_MA, 62-62).

Support offered by lecturers. It is substantial to stress the role of lecturers as part of the academic adjustment of Chinese students. According to the interviewees, some lecturers provide academic support either by modifying their teaching methods or showing understanding to Chinese students.

First, some lecturers modified teaching methods. ***Method 1 -- involving Chinese students into the discussion by initiating topics that are familiar to them.*** One Chinese interviewee mentioned that her lecturer had considered the fact of presence of Chinese students in the class and tried to find topics that were familiar to Chinese students, so that they could join the discussion:

I noticed that our lecturers have done some modification at class. In the first semester, all examples that lecturers cited at class are Europe-centered. For instance, the lecture cited an example of an advertisement on TV. We Chinese student haven’t seen the advertisement, therefore we could not participated in the discussion at all. One of us (Chinese students) complained this to the lecturers after class. Since this semester²⁶⁰, at class, some lecturers often ask us “what is the situation in China?” [...]

²⁵⁶ At such events, some Chinese students mentioned that they enjoyed the first opportunity of get acquainted with peer students; while others felt uncomfortable and nervous, as they hadn’t had much intercultural experience before and didn’t know how to behavior and what to talk.

²⁵⁷ Her faculty requires every newcomer student to make a 30-minute talk with the professors or lecturers. The student first talks about his or her interest in the field and the professor will recommend courses or give some suggestions in terms of choosing the courses accordingly.

²⁵⁸ Often, they missed the appointment of university-level orientation (mentioned by 李晓瑜, Jing_MA and Wan_MA).

²⁵⁹ Some interviewees (e.g. Jing_MA and Chen_MA) mentioned that they had heard the orientation was all about showing around library and dining hall.

²⁶⁰ Here, she meant the second semester.

Obviously, lecturers are making efforts to encourage us to raise our opinions and participate in the discussion. (Qian_MA, 82-86)

Such initiative is helpful to Chinese students in social science and humanities, as many examples discussed at class is culture-specific. Nevertheless, not every lecturer has been aware of this, for example, Zhao (2007) mentioned that some lecturer didn't realize the importance of explaining acronyms, cultural-specific terminology, and sociocultural background knowledge.

Method 2 -- encouraging Chinese students to raise questions. Chinese students reported that their lecturers encouraged them to ask questions.

Our lecturers encouraged us to bravely raise questions, as they often said "there are no foolish questions." [...]In spite of that, some students still kept silent at class and lecturers had even tried to "force" us to talk. (Qian_MA, 81-81)

At class, I normally don't behave actively as peer German students or other international students. I find that our lecturers realized that there were students from other learning cultures in their class and took this fact into consideration and modified their teaching methods. For example, the lecturers often ask me my opinions to certain questions. (Cao_MA, 148-149)

These examples indicated that lecturers also experienced the process of getting to know students' expectation. Zhao (2007) emphasized that lecturers in the host country, similar to Chinese students, also experienced three stages (from experiencing the frustration and unfamiliarity at the initial stage to the gradual integration relaxation at the last stage) in intercultural academic identity, since the intercultural adaptation is a two-way process.

Second, showing understanding to the foreign student identity. According to the interviewees, some lecturers or examiners showed understanding to the identity of international students, as international students often have difficulty in answering questions because of the German language. Chinese students mentioned that at the written exams, they were allowed to have dictionary (mentioned by Zhou_MA); at oral exam, their lectures offered the chance of choosing German and English to answer the question:

At the oral examination, the professor would first ask me: whether I would use English or German. [...] Although I chose German, his offer made me feel less nervous. [...] When I failed to express myself well, he would encourage me and said "take your time". Almost every professor here is patient and nice. (Pang_MA, 135-135; 140-143; 238-241)

Nevertheless, Chinese students reported not every lecturer shows understanding to international student identity and makes no difference between Chinese/international students (in Chinese 一视同仁 or *yishitongren*).

Not every lecturer shows understanding to our identity as international students. [...] For example, if we fail to answer one question at class, the lecture would ask: why don't you participate in the discussion? [...] But actually, we are thinking about his question, but it takes us much more to come up with an answer. [...] I think such teaching skill at such intercultural class is closely related to the overseas experience of lecturers. (Rong_MA, 34-34, 41-45)

The situation [whether lecturers show understanding to Chinese students] varies: at oral exam, if the lecturer pays more attention to the knowledge, instead of the language skills, we (Chinese students) still get a good note; nevertheless, some lecturers who valued spoken language highly told us: based on your answer, I could have given you a 1.0, but because of your language skill, I can only give you 1.3. (Zhou_MA, 147-147)

Third, the academic support turns out to be emotional support. Evidently, according to the above examples, the perception of lecturers' encouragement, praise, tolerance, and understanding turn out to be emotional support to Chinese students.

I remembered clearly, after the first group-presentation that I've ever had in Germany, our lecturer came to us and praised our performance. [...] She obviously had noticed that I was very nervous and encouraged me "look, doing a presentation is not that difficult as you have thought". Her understanding encouraged me a lot. (Lee_MA, 112-112)

After the first lecturer, our lecturer came to me after class and said "I once had some Chinese student in my class as well. Don't worry about the German language: it is normal that one has difficulty at the very beginning. According to my experience with Chinese students, they all wrote excellent semester papers at the end". (Wang_MA, 83-96)

Support offered by faculty. First, academic support from the coordinator at the faculty level is an important academic support resource to Chinese students. In some faculty, there is a specific academic staff in charge of the students, provides suggestions to the planning of the studies. Chinese students reported that the existence of a certain person is helpful, as he provides them with a chance to ask questions concerning the *Modul* and examinations.

We have a coordinator in our program²⁶¹. Since she is only in charge of our program, she knows the structure of our program very well. As long as one has any difficulty, he can immediately turn to the coordinator for help. The coordinator takes care of us. (Ting_MA, 48-48)

In our program²⁶², every 3 or 4 students share one “advisor”. The advisor is a lecturer in our faculty. The advisor’s role is similar to the class-teacher in China. [...] Students can turn to him or her for help. [...] Although I haven’t “troubled” the advisors yet, I feel they are helpful and friendly. (Cao_MA, 168-170; 273-274)

Second, the advisor, tutor, or mentor acts as a contact person who helps the international students.

We had one mentor in the first semester. As long as one has some questions concerning homework, he can turn to the mentor for help. [...] Whether the effect of mentor-program is helpful or not depends on international students’ German level. To those who have a good German skill, they have no problem in understanding the content at class. To them, the mentor is not that important; [...] but to us Chinese students, the help offered by mentor is quite helpful. (Lee_MA, 116-116)

The help offered by tutors is limited, as he himself is student as well; and the help offered by the student advisor also varies: I remembered that when I was writing my master thesis, my student advisor did not show too much concern to me and has never contacted me. But I’ve also heard that some advisors were really strict and required to meet the student twice a week. (Chen_MA, 76-79)

Furthermore, at the interviews, not many informants mentioned that they had turned to the *Studienberatung* (in English: Student Advisory Service) for help. Compared with other international students in Germany, Chinese students seldom seek help from the *Studienberatung*. One survey reported that 60% of international students at a German university have turned to the *Studienberatung* for help (Peroz, 2008). Most international students agreed that they had received helpful advice from the *Studienberatung*.

Support offered by fellow students. Fellow students taking the same course offer some help to Chinese students as well. As “mentoring facilities” (Kingston & Forland, 2008, p.214), the local counterparts play a role in the academic support system. Ramsay, Jones, and Barker (2007) reported that well adjusted students reported higher levels of social companionship support than the less adjusted group. Chinese students receive help from fellow students in terms of group-work and academic portal.

²⁶¹ The program she attended is “The Master’s Program in Economics and Management Science”.

²⁶² The program she attended is “Master in British Studies”.

First, support offered at the group-work. The group-work provides Chinese students with an opportunity to work together with German students, and Chinese students reported they did receive much help from their German counterparts. Obviously, if Chinese students have some courses similar to their peer students, they might have opportunities to work together.

Because of the group work, I got to know some German students. After doing some presentation together, we are familiar with each other. [...] As long as I met some difficulty in doing the presentation, they helped me at once. (Lee_MA, 81-81)

Because of the poor German language, I failed to make much contribution to the group presentation. My teammate did offer some help at the presentation. When they noticed that I could not answer the question, they would lend me a hand. (Wan_MA, 53-53)

Such support also depends on native or other non-conational international students, whether they have patience and understanding to Chinese students. One research indicates that German students also show no motivation to learn together with foreign students or offer some necessary help (Heublein, Özkilic, & Sommer, 2007).

I have much experience working with German students in doing the group work. I think the success of cooperation depends on the teammate. The ideal situation is that the teammate holds an open attitude, is willing to offer help and listens to my opinion attentively. Frankly, I had come across only very few, who didn't want to help me. (Lee_MA, 101-101)

Moreover, both interviewees majoring in electrical engineering (Chen_MA and Pang_MA) mentioned that as long as they could not read the handwriting of lecturers on the blackboard, they will borrow German students' notes. In addition, a good academic companion is essential to Chinese students. Interviewees from faculty with a large number of Chinese students mentioned that they studied together at leisure time.

I remembered that some Chinese students offered me suggestions when I started my study in Germany, as they registered one or two semesters earlier as I did and had more experience. In addition, I usually learn and prepare for the exams with other Chinese students. There are some advantages: first, we can help each other; second, we can urge each other to work hard. As long as someone knows the solution, he will explain it to other. [...] One might encounter enormous difficulty as individual, but with a group, he turns out to be stronger. (Chen_MA, 61-63; 71-73)

Second, academic portal provides important information. Academic portal is a discipline-specific platform, where students at the same faculty share the academic

resources or learning materials.²⁶³ Chinese students mentioned that they contacted senior students in the same faculty for help. One Chinese student attending international master program mentioned students in their program had “protocol”, on which senior students who attended oral test earlier shared their experience. Nevertheless, not every faculty has such practice.

In our program, as long as one meets some difficulty, he can turn to someone for help: no matter it is homework or materials for preparing the exam. [...] For example, we have “protocol”: some students wrote down the process of oral examination and shared it with others. This is quite helpful to us. (Zhang_MA, 161-167; 173-174)

Support offered by supervisor and research group. To doctoral student in natural science and engineering science, supervisor and research team at the laboratory is a significant support-system for them; doctoral students majoring in humanities normally do not work at a laboratory, compared with the natural science and engineering science, it is not common that they work in teams and obtain help from the colleagues.²⁶⁴

First, compared with their counterparts in the field of social science and humanities, doctoral students in engineering or natural science normally work more closely with their supervisor; sometimes they participated in the projects led by their supervisor. In addition, they worked with their supervisor at the same laboratory; consequently, they met their supervisor more often.

As doctoral students, we have an appointment with the committee every three to five months: discussing the research plan and the timetable. [...] In addition, as I don't speak German, he requires that everyone speaks English at the regular meeting. [...] As far as I know, some natural science faculties in our university are quite conservative in using English as the working language. (Yin_PhD, 119-119; 162-181)

My supervisor's office is adjacent to mine. When I pass his office and find that he is not busy, I will talk with him. [...] I have good communication with my supervisor. [...] He recommends me to read more doctoral thesis. (Wu_PhD, 22-29; 42-42; 52-52)

Second, two doctoral students pointed out that their colleagues also have done some contribution to their research progress.

²⁶³ E.g. one Chinese student mentioned “Freitagsrunde” (<http://wiki.freitagsrunde.org/Hauptseite>), an online academic portal organized by students at the Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science, Technical University of Berlin.

²⁶⁴ In addition, since doctoral students in the field of natural science and engineering science have little/no German language proficiency, it is significant that English is the laboratory language, so that German language becomes no barrier to them.

So far I have introduced my research topics twice at the group-discussion. [...] Everyone has his specific research topic; except the supervisor, nobody else knows clearly what the other is doing, but at the group-discussion, one receives good suggestions from others. (Wu_PhD, 31-40; 161-168)

In addition to the communication in the labs, my colleagues and I have things to share. [...] My supervisor promotes such communication among doctoral students by organizing some activities like a barbecue party. (Yin_PhD, 122-125; 188-193)

Summary of the academic support. Based on the interviews, the above discussion about academic support at German universities can be concluded into the Table 6-1. The left side is the support provider, and the right side is the content of the academic support. Each support provider offers specific assistance to facilitate Chinese/international students' adjustment.

At the university-level, international office offers orientation course (information about academic and campus life, language centre, library, and dining hall) and organizes some regular activities, and language center offers language training. At the faculty-level, the faculty-specific orientation courses introduce the faculty, courses and the exam. Lecturers, tutors, and mentors play a more important role in the everyday academic learning, by providing support for academic activities task. Their patience and understanding encourages Chinese students. Furthermore, fellow students' help (note-taking and sharing learning materials for homework and exams) is also helpful for Chinese students to deal with the difficulty.

Table 6-1: Academic support at German universities

Support provider	Content/ Program
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ University ▫ International student office ▫ Language Center ▪ Institutions and departments/ faculty ▪ Lecturers, tutors and mentors ▪ Fellow students / colleague 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Delivering information about academic and campus life, language centre, library and dining hall <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Orientation for freshman (university-wide) ▫ Orientation for international freshman (university-wide) ▪ Various activities ▪ Intercultural training course ▪ General language course ▪ Academic reading & writing ▪ Introduction of the faculty, course (learning plan, participation) and the exam <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Orientation for freshman (institution-wide) ▫ Orientation for foreign freshman (institution-wide) ▪ Offering support for academic activities task ▪ Note-taking ▪ Academic portal (sharing learning materials for homework and exams) ▪ Learning together with other Chinese students (in faculty that with a large number of Chinese students)

Furthermore, it is important to point out that academic support from lecturers varies from faculty to faculty and from lecturer to lecturer. Many reasons lead to the varied academic support.

First, the intercultural experience or sensitivity of lecturers is precious. One interview mentioned that “Many lecturers in our faculty have overseas academic experience themselves. They understand us better and were ready to help us” (Qian_MA, 37-37). Zhao (2007) similarly found that British lecturers, who have Chinese students in their class, over time, become more culturally sensitive, adopted integration strategies, and made gradual progress in adapting to intercultural academic identity.

Second, the number of international students in different faculties varied. Some faculties have a large number of Chinese/international students (e.g., engineering, economics, etc.); accordingly, Chinese students reported that they have easy access to co-national friends at the faculty of engineering (Pang_MA, 104-105). Since the co-national communication is “easier” and involves no language difficulty (mentioned by Yang_MA), Chinese students prefer to turn to Chinese students, instead of German lecturers or German native students, for help.

Unlike students in engineering, Chinese students in the case study regarded the large number of Chinese students in the faculty as a deficit: they noticed that their German counterparts had less motivation to communicate with them, as Chinese students always stay together with other Chinese. One student in the case study also noticed “when two Chinese students meet, automatically, we will talk in Chinese. Nevertheless, if one German student is also there, he will feel excluded from the conversation” (Qian_MA, 55-55). By contrast, in some faculties with a very small number of international students (not to mention Chinese students), Chinese students either asked their lecturers or solve the problems alone. It is interesting to point out that in faculty with few Chinese or international students, German students, in the very beginning, showed concerns to the international students, and were willing to offer help.

I notice that German students and lecturers are curious about me, as there are only two Chinese students in our faculty. To my surprise, the identity of being a minority becomes my advantage at my faculty. They (lecturers and peer students) are curious about me. For example, they ask me my motivation of studying Theology in Germany. [...] Some of my fellow students asked me whether I needed any help [...] and some lent me notes or summary of course. (Jing_MA, 40-40)

Third, the faculty culture matters. Each discipline has its own “study climate, the structure of demands, and the intensity of the work expected of students” (Peisert & Framhein, 1990, p. 62). Becher (1987) separated disciplines into two dimensions: pure-applied and hard-soft disciplinary and Boughey (2000) pointed each discipline has its “academic dress code” (p.288). For instance, some faculties require different degrees of

group-work among students. It is important to point out that some subjects emphasize group-work, while others might expect students to have individual thinking. For example, law, as an academic discipline, is a competitive one. One student majoring in law reported “different from chemistry and physics, the subject law is a relative lonely subject” (Sun_PhD, 125-125); in the meantime, students study engineering often mentioned they did projects or homework together with others (Zhang_MA and Pang_MA). In the meanwhile, the concept of the faculty in supervising and supporting international students also different, accordingly, Chinese students indicated the different degree of support. For example, one Chinese interviewee mentioned that some faculties organize better orientation course than others:

I find the orientation course organized by our faculty was too simple and too short: professors briefly introduced themselves and their office hour, while the faculty didn't provide us with any handout or wrote anything on the blackboard. A Chinese friend of mine studying Education told me that her faculty paid much attention to the orientation course and taught freshmen how to choose the Modul in details: what the Modul is, how to combine courses for each Modul, and what one should pay attention to. During the instruction at the orientation course, their faculty also demonstrated PowerPoint slides. (Wan_MA, 33-33)

In conclusion, the above academic support: content, support provider, and reasons of the difference is presented in the following Figure 6-2.

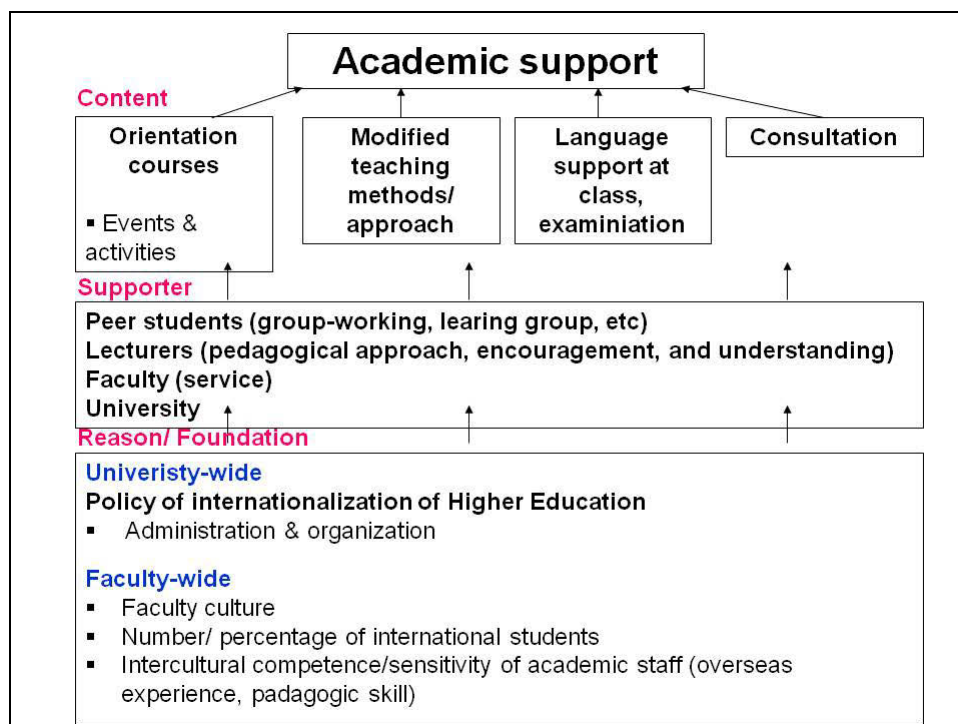


Figure 6-2: Academic support to international students at German universities

Student identity: exchange students and “free-mover”

A good example of academic and daily support to international students is the exchange program. In recent years, there is an increasing number of cooperation between German and Chinese universities. Such exchange programs normally employ a coordinator to take care of international students. Interviews with Chinese exchange students reported that they benefit substantially from the help offered by the program. Before departure, they had access to pre-departure training (including German language and general knowledge concerning Germany and German universities); on arrival, the program coordinator picked them up at the airport and helped them to find the accommodation and register at the city hall (mentioned by Zhou_MA and Wang_MA). Coordinator also organizes special orientations for them (mentioned by Wang_MA).

As exchange student, the adjustment was not difficult: I remembered that one coordinator from my home university in China came together with us and spent two months with us in Germany, helping us to solve the problem in the initial period. Since we were a group and unconsciously adjusted to the learning environment in Germany. (Jing_MA, 20-20)

As exchange student, we have a relative easier life: someone is taking care of us. [...] Compared with other Chinese students who come to Germany alone, we exchange students definitely enjoy some privilege. (Zhou_MA, 215-215)

The result is consistent with Zhou and Todman's (2009) finding that Chinese students who came in groups and those who came individually demonstrate different patterns of specifically academic adaptation.

Furthermore, coordinators from both the host and home universities contacted them regularly (mentioned by Zhou_MA), and were ready to offer them a hand to deal with the academic²⁶⁵ and daily problem. In addition, exchange students had the opportunity to attend free German language training, which organized specially for them.

I appreciated the support of TU (Technical University of) Berlin. We exchange students were not good in German language at the beginning and the exchange program offered us 10-month German course at that time. [...] It is free of charge. (Zhou_MA, 97-105)

Intercultural communication with peer students

Current situation of intercultural communication. The results of this research show that co-national Chinese students dominant friend circle of Chinese students in

²⁶⁵ For example, coordinator helped exchange student to solve the problem of *Modul-System* (mentioned by Wang_MA).

Germany. The results of the questionnaire²⁶⁶ indicate that among thirty-one students, 81% Chinese students mentioned that they had “more Chinese friends”, while merely 6% reported that they had “more German friends”. Surprisingly, there were even 13% participants mentioned that they had “almost no friend at all” (see Figure 6-3). It is worth noting that participants of Study 3 were Chinese students who spent two semesters in Germany, and half of them are exchange students²⁶⁷. This might result in the composition of their friend circle. Nevertheless, the majority of interviews of Study 1 and 2 reported that their social circle was mainly composed of Chinese friends. Similar result indicated that several international students didn’t have any German friend at all (Zeilinger, 2006) and 54.8% Chinese students felt lonely in Germany (Zhou, 2010, p.130).

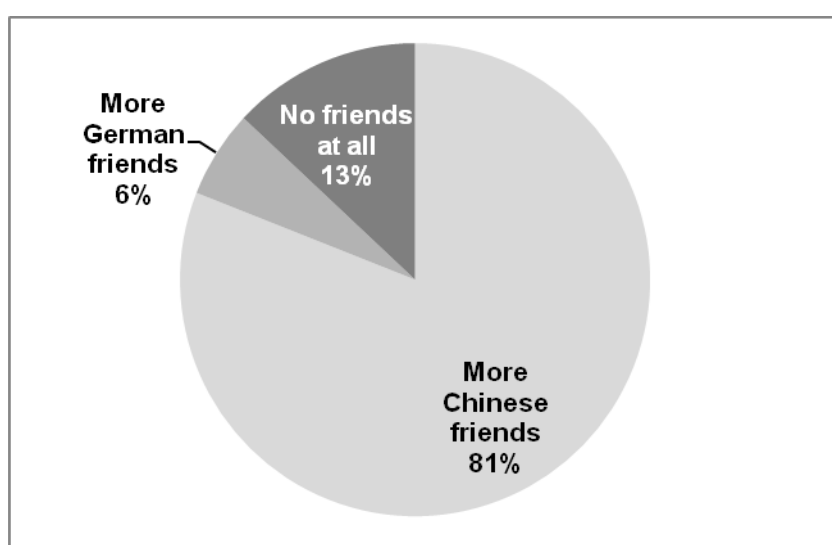


Figure 6-3: Composition of friends circle in Germany according to Study 3²⁶⁸

Chinese students not only have more Chinese friends, but contacted more frequently with their co-nationals. In terms of the frequency of contact with different national groups, 77.4% Chinese student often contacted the “Chinese-friend group”, while only 19.4% participants often communicated with “German-friend group”. The frequency of contact was even smaller with friends from other nationalities.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁶ The result is based on the questionnaire in the Phase II.

²⁶⁷ Exchange students often come in group as well.

²⁶⁸ Note: Chinese students were offered the choices: (1) more Chinese friends, (2) more German friends, (3) more friends from other nationalities (i.e. non-Chinese or non-German), (4) friends from various nationalities, but no specific nationality of friends is dominating, and (5) almost no friends at all.

²⁶⁹ It is important to point out that Chinese overseas students are not the only international students groups that stay more often with co-national students. For example, instead of contacting counterparts in the host country, a large number of European exchange students attending “The ERASMUS Programme” often meet other European students and form “Erasmus communities” (Otten, 2003, p.13).

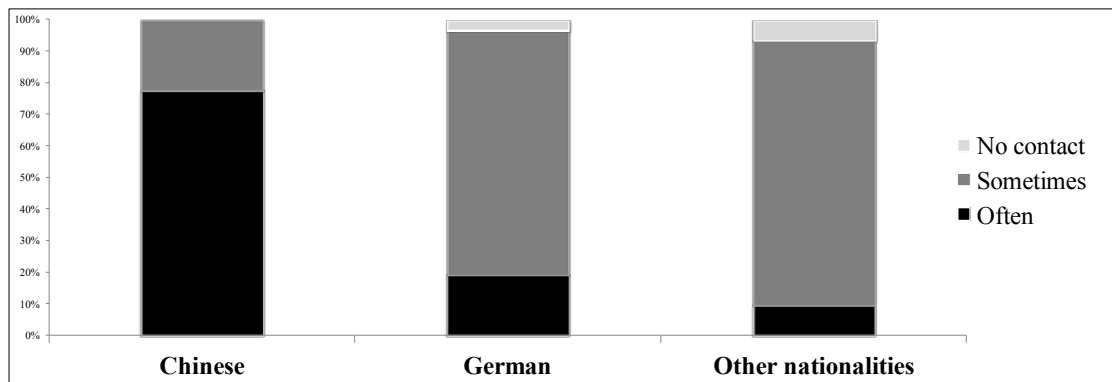


Figure 6-4: Frequency of contacting with friends from different national groups according to Study 3

Results of interviews are consistent with the questionnaire. Chinese students mentioned that they met Chinese friends more often.²⁷⁰

Most of my friends in Germany are Chinese. We meet each other and cook together once a week or every two weeks. One easily gets to know other Chinese students by attending some gatherings among Chinese students. [...] Not only the Chinese students, but students from other countries like to stay with their conational friends as well. The Chinese food just links all the Chinese. (Cao_MA, 256-256; 261-262)

We (Chinese students) do like cook and eat together. It is more interesting to cook and eat together with Chineses students than with students from other countries. I did once invite some students from other countries, but I have to explain everything to them and it is troublesome. (Zhang_MA, 252-252)

They will tell me how to deal with the examination and how to learn the German language. They sometimes ask me about the progress of my study and give me some advice. I just feel that they can better understand me. (Wan_MA, 77-78)

Chinese students have easy access to the other Chinese students. The same language, national and ethnic identities, and similar difficulty encountering in Germany easily link them together. Previous empirical research indicated that 71.4% of Chinese students would turn to fellow Chinese students for help, while 50% would ask German friends for a favor and 44% asked other non-conational students for help (Zhou, 2010). Co-national Chinese students studying in Germany are regarded as “fellow-sufferer” by participants (Zhou, 2010). Although it is true that international students tend to have more contacts with their co-national friends, it is also important that point out that some

²⁷⁰ In addition, some female Chinese students got to know Chinese friends through their boyfriends (Lee_MA; Wan_MA and Zhang_MA).

Chinese students only stay with co-national Chinese students. In the case study, both German lecturers and the Georgian student referred this problem.

I see the difference between Chinese students and other international students in our faculty. It is true the Ukrainian students have close contacts with other Ukrainian students, but they also often talk with the Italian, Arabian, Czech students. They talk with each other in German [...] Nevertheless, the Chinese students in our faculty only contact with Chinese students; they don't have Korean or Japanese friends at all. The problem result leads to the fact that they have little contact to the German society, but also they fail to improve their German language. (Lecturer 1, 17-17)

They (Chinese students) always stay together. What I really don't like is some of Chinese students often come half an hour before the lectures and reserve the seats for other Chinese students. Maybe this is a custom in China, I was a little bit angry about that. (Georgian Student, 39-39)

In addition to the co-national Chinese friends, Chinese students have some international student friends, who they regard as “fellow-sufferers” (in Chinese 同病相怜 or *tongbingxianglian*). The similar student identity as “foreign student” stimulates Chinese students make friends with other international students, are “fellow-sufferers” as well.

I still don't have the self-confidence when talking with the German students: they talk quite fast, which was a big problem for me, especially at the beginning of the study. [...] Because of that, when I meet international students from other countries, I feel close to them: we are all foreigners here and we help with each other. (Zhang_MA, 90-91; 160-160)

Other international students, from Morocco or Georgia in our faculty are really friendly. They often talk with me. (Yang_MA, 153-160)

I have better relationship with those “friendly” students: say, Chinese and Korean students. We all come from Asia and I feel genial and natural in talking with them. [...] I regard the support as one important emotional support. (Zhao_MA, 127-134)

I have over ten foreign friends here and with three of them I have close communication. My circle of friend not only limit to the German friends, as I have friends from countries as well. (Zhou_MA, 217-217)

The result indicates that the relationship between Chinese and their peer German students is just “hi-bye friends”. The result indicated that in the initial phase, there was no intensive communication between Chinese students and their peer German students. Sovic (2009) first used the term “hi-bye friends” to describe the relationship between

international and local students. Instead of having much interaction, they “friendly” say “hi” when they meet and say “goodbye” when they leave.²⁷¹ The term itself vividly describes the current situation of such intercultural communication.

I don't understand German students' joke and I have no idea about the politician, the film, or the song they are talking about. I feel difficult to join their topics. [...] The culture is different and we don't share the same topic. When we meet, we just greet each other by asking “how are doing?” and that is all. We don't have any in-depth communication. (Fang_BA, 30-30)

We don't have much to talk. We just say hello to each other [...] I do want to talk with German students, but I really have no idea what shall I talk with them. When I have problem in understanding something at lecture, I will ask them and they friendly explain it to me. However, after that, I have no idea what I should do, which is an embarrassing situation. (Wan_MA, 31-31; 72-74)

After the lecture, there is little communication. Very often, the topic between us is “Do you have other courses today?” and then saying “bye” to each other. (Jing_MA, 78-78)

I find it is really a pity that there is too little communication between German students and me. (Zhao_MA, 70-70)

The above texts indicated that one important reason that Chinese students mentioned was they didn't have topics with German students in common. Then, it is important to create chances for communication, instead of waiting for the common topic to come. For instance, by participating in the process, sojourners gradually get to know “various on-going events, norms, attitudes, beliefs, values and other information about the host culture” (Kim, 1988, p.114).

There are a large number of cultural activities; [...] one will get to know the host countries better by attending its activities. It is more than just simply watch TV, but participate in it. [...] I often attend such activities. (Lee_MA, 134-140)

I often attended the university-sport. [...] Very few Chinese students attend sport courses here, while my classmates from other countries are really active in attending sport activities. (Zhang_MA, 269-277)

²⁷¹ Interestingly, the Georgian student also mentioned “although Chinese students appear to be friendly, it seemed that there was a boundary between Chinese students and us (other international students). The conversation is often ‘hey, how are you doing’ and then the conversation is over” (Georgian student, 7-7).

It is worth noting that those students who just came to Germany were inclined to defined their relationship with native German students as “hi-bye friends”, as they still have not established lasting friendship; while those Chinese students who spent several semesters in Germany did not refer their relationship with peer students as “hi-bye friends”.

Reasons of the current state of friend-making. Several reasons cause the problem. First, it is difficult to keep friendship on campus. At Chinese universities, especially at bachelor’s level, classmates offer important academic support. Since the curriculum schedule for certain semester at the bachelor’s level is designed by faculty, students attending the same lectures automatically form a class. At German universities, the concept “classmates” (in Chinese 同学 or *tongxue*) is not common, as each student has their own curriculum. Considering this, their original peer-support disappear, they need to find new peer support. Instead of obtaining the help from “classmates”, Chinese students obtain help and support from students who attend the same course. Because of this, two interviewees (Fan_Graduate and Lee_MA) mentioned that “attending the same courses” (especially some group-work or doing project together) at university-wide was one of opportunity for them to get to know German friends. Another two interviewees (Pang_MA and Zhang_MA) mentioned that they once had good relationship with their fellow students, but because they later chose different courses, they didn’t manage to keep the contact. In the meantime, two students (Cao_MA and Chen_MA) indicated that students attending international master program or studying at university of applied sciences had better friendship with peer students, as students had more courses in common. Furthermore, such program was small-scale, and relationship among students was closer.

Second, Chinese students don’t often attend social activities. In addition, Chinese students and peer students in Germany attending fewer activities in common: not many Chinese students attend sport activities on campus or social activities off campus. The overwhelming majority of Chinese students “sometimes” attended the activities in Germany (see Figure 6-5). There are a large amount of activities available at German cities. Over 90% of Chinese students “sometimes” attend the activities or another 7% take part in the cultural events “often”. Others took the initiatives and invited German peer students to their home and cooked together.

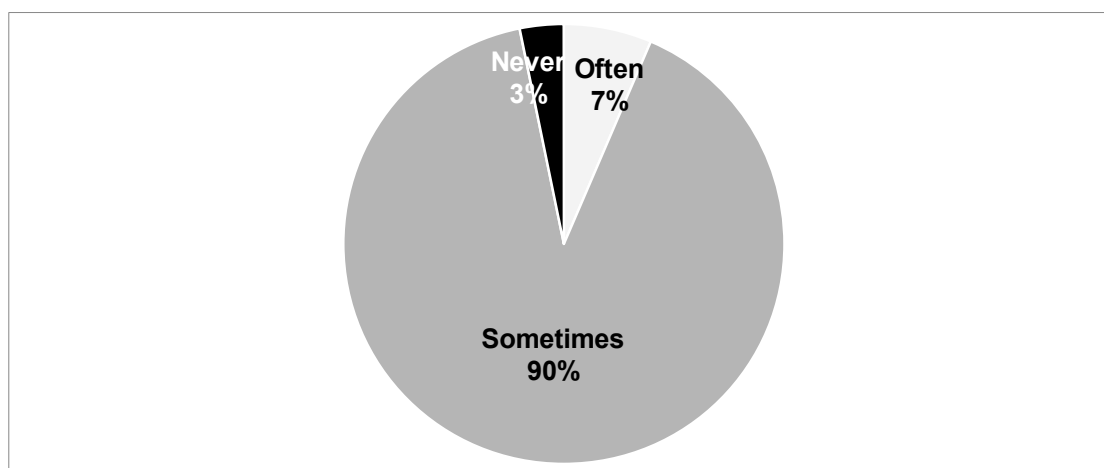


Figure 6-5: Frequency of attending local activities/events in Germany according to Study 3

Participating in social activities (gatherings and parties) at leisure time is decisive for creating chances for making friends. If Chinese students don't take part in certain activities, it is natural that they would feel lonely and have few common topics with their German counterparts. But they do need someone leading them to attend the activities. If they only stay at home, it is impossible for them to get to know German students or students from other nationalities. Nevertheless, the result indicated that participants did not often attend social activities as their local counterparts. Unlike their peer students, who enjoy "night life" (Cao_MA, 184-184) and who are "party-animals" (Ting_MA), Chinese students were accustomed to a regular everyday living rhythm (such as going to bed early). In addition, Chinese students found the "drink culture" at the party is also difficult to appreciate. Some interviewees (Fan_Graduate and Chen_MA) clearly stated that they didn't like drinking, and found the forms of parties (talking while drinking) a little bit boring.

Students from other European countries know how to deal with German students, [...] as they have the similar customs and cultures. [...] Take the party-culture as an example; Chinese students just don't like it. (Yang_MA, 233-241)

I still remember the first time that I went to a party. I was the only Chinese there and I wanted to leave the party immediately. [...] I guess it was also confusing for others to think topics to talk with me. [...] But after attending the parties several times, one will also find some topics to talk with others. (Jia_MA, 72-74)

One of my Chinese friends shared his experience of attending party with me: as he speaks only English and find the parties of holding glasses with wines and walked around for talking is painful. (Zhang_MA, 266-267)

Third, Chinese students are not equipped with the language and intercultural skill. Another challenge is Chinese students lack the skills of intercultural communication. A Chinese student indicated that when talking with German students, she could understand what others said, but she had problems in making response.

I can understand what German students say, but I don't know how to answer. Or, when I want to express one opinion, I don't know how to put my idea into German words. In the German language, the choice of words is demanding. (Wan_MA, 63-63)

Furthermore, Chinese students indicated that they were not as passionate as their peer students, who actively participated in the social activities. Personality plays a role in the communication. It is interesting to point out that a few students described their personalities as “shy” or “introvert” (Cao_MA, Fan_Graduate, Zhao_MA, and Zhang_MA), which they regarded as an obstacle for the communication.

The problems lie in the personality or character of us Chinese. Students from South America or Africa won't have such problems. Only we Chinese students or Asian students are shy and timid. (Zhang_MA, 202-208)

We have a big kitchen in our student dormitory, and students from different countries are chatting there. [...] I do want to join them, but I am not brave enough. We Chinese students just wait others to invite us. (Jia_MA, 57-59)

Forth, the intercultural communication also depends on the motivation and initiative of both Chinese and German students. Some Chinese students didn't have much motivation to get to know German students: they either wanted to finish the study as soon as possible or they already had some pre-knowledge about Germany.

It depends on one's motivation. If one wants to finish the study as early as possible, then it is fine that he just have to pass the exam²⁷² and it is not necessarily for him to change his “Chinese character”. But if one wants to stay and work in Germany after graduation, he should change his shyness and become active. [...] Since I belong to the former group, I spend more time on the study and do not go out often with German friends. (Jia_MA, 36-38; 46-46)

To be frank, I don't have specific motivation to talk more with German students. [...] Furthermore, if I come here alone, instead of coming with a group of other exchange students, I might have more time to talk with German students. (Wang_MA, 101-102; 107-108)

²⁷² Furthermore, it is also true that some Chinese students have heavy workload or part-time job have less time for social activities, which they sacrificed opportunities of socializing and of getting to know their European host cultural better.

Since many Chinese students will go back to China after finishing the study here, we don't care too much about integrating to the German society. This is not the same with some students from other developing or underdeveloped countries. Because of political or economical reasons, they have no other better choice, but stay in Germany (therefore, the integration for them is more important). (Zhang_MA, 202-209)

I have the impression that it is not difficult to make a friend here in Germany, but it is really difficult to achieve an "in-depth" friendship. Friendship and communication depends on both sides: I don't have strong wish (to talk to German students) and my peer German students have little interest (to talk to me). (Cao_MA, 269-270)

Although many students complain the difficulty of making friends with peer German students, only a few take the initiative by inviting German students to cook together or participate the social activities on- or off-campus.

I've invited one German student to eat "hot pot" (in Chinese 火锅 or huoguo) to my apartment, and the experience was quite successful. He enjoyed the time very much. [...] I think it is important to make friends with those Germans, who are interested in Chinese culture or have been to China: as one has something to talk with German friends. (Fang_BA, 50-53)

It all depends on oneself in making friends. [...] I attended the activities organized by KHG²⁷³. Although I don't attend the worship, I participate in other activities, such as watching film. [...] In addition, there is "buddy-program" in our university. I once invited one German student to my apartment and cooked some Chinese food for him. (Yang_MA, 166-171; 210-210; 243-245)

Since communication is a two-way process, German students also have to do contribution. Some Chinese students indicated German students were "shy" or didn't show much initiative.

The German students sometimes are stuffy. They don't first talk to others, and wait for others to come to them. But Chinese students have exactly the same problem. (Jia_MA, 57-57)

German students do not show much initiative in terms of communication; often, it is we that first talk to them. [...] I would expect German students take the initiative; thus we (Chinese students) are willing to talk with them. (Yang_MA, 153-160)

²⁷³ KHG is the abbreviation of *Katholische Hochschulgemeinde*, which is a Catholic Church community at the university.

We are exchange students and come in group. We participate in activities together and have little communication with German students. [...] Sometimes I also feel confused: I want to communicate with German students, but I don't know how. (Fang_BA, 49-49; 130-130)

Fifth, the accommodation plays a role in the intercultural communication. More than half of the Chinese participants in Study 1 and 2 lived in student dormitory (63.6%), and four of them live alone or with their partner in an apartment (18.2%), and three Chinese students lived in a shared apartment (13.6%). Only one student lived in an environment with more Chinese (0.6%). Study 3 indicated similar result of accommodation of Chinese students: among thirty-one participants, 45% lived in an environment with different nationalities, and 32% reported their flat-mates are more Germans than students from other nations, and 13% live alone or with the partner (see Figure 6-6).

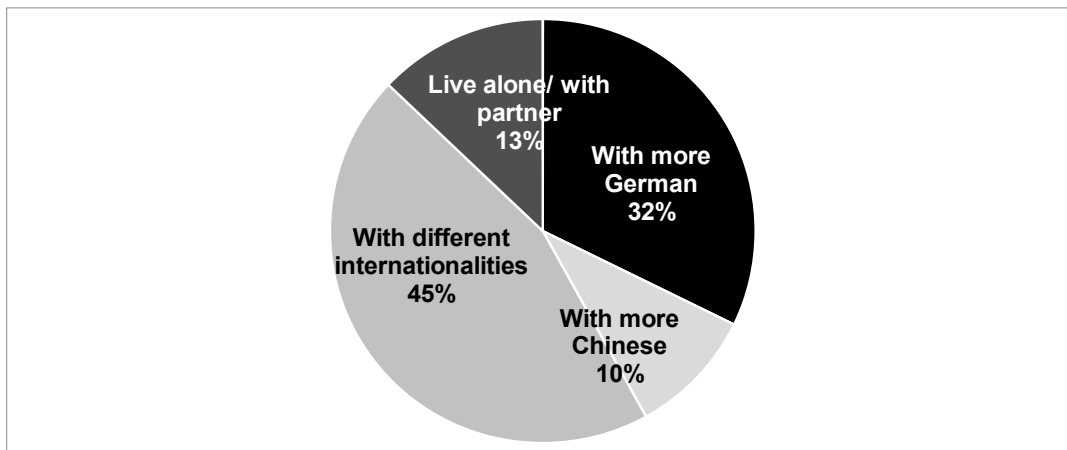


Figure 6-6: Situation of accommodation according to Study 3

The student dormitory (apartment or shared apartment) is the main form of accommodation among Chinese students. A shared apartment provides students with an open place (kitchen and living room) to cook and communicate together.

I enjoy the time living in the student dormitory with German students. I appreciate this experience, as I have been learning to deal with German students. (Sun_PhD, 79-79)

I live in a shared apartment with four rooms in a student dormitory. [...] I have had neighbors coming from different countries. [...] Sometimes the experience is not so pleasant, as students from different countries have their own customs. (Zhang_MA, 277-287)

Except for WG²⁷⁴, I have lived in various forms of accommodation in Germany. [...] The form of accommodation which has the highest degree of integration is an apartment with a shared kitchen. Students have the opportunity to meet each other, by cooking and talking together. (Fan_Graduate, 41-45)

Another option is the shared apartment (in German: Wohngemeinschaft, WG). It is an accommodation form that more common to German students. One important reason that Chinese students chose to live a WG was to meet native German students, in order to obtain more knowledge of daily life of German people; only a small number of the interviewees (Rong_MA, Qian_MA, and Yin_PhD) lived in this form of accommodation. It is important to mention that WG in Germany is more than a shared apartment, as people shares a WG do many things together. The flatmate trust each other and sometimes even do not lock the door of their own rooms.

Homestay or living with a local family is not very common among Chinese students in Germany. Only one Chinese interviewee (Ting_MA) reported that they had lived or lived with a family. This result is different from that in New Zealand, as one study in New Zealand reported that 85% of the Chinese respondents lived with other Chinese; while 11% lived with homestay (Zhang & Brunton, 2007).

Some interviewees realized the importance of the form of accommodation as an important option of meeting German native students and changed the form of accommodation to obtain more communication with local people.

The environment is not all. Actually, even in a faculty with a large number of Chinese students, one can still “jump out”, take the leisure time as an example. [...] I have lived one year in Munich; therefore, I know how to better integrate into the German society. For example, the accommodation is very decisive: to live in the WG is a good choice, while the student dormitory is not ideal. (Rong_MA, 48-50)

6.1.3 Personal factors: change to fit

“Any circumstance hitting a limit will begin to change. Change will in turn lead to an unimpeded state, and then lead to continuity”

– Books of Changes (《易经》)²⁷⁵

²⁷⁴ WG is the abbreviation of *Wohngemeinschaft* in German.

²⁷⁵ In Chinese: 穷则变，变则通，通则久

Although the background and situational factors are decisive to the academic adjustment, the personal factors play an important role as well. Sussman (2000) emphasized that “Adaptation emphasizes proactive attempts to be culturally flexible and resilient within the new cultural environment” (p.360). The personal factor is composed of students’ personality, effort, and the amount of part-time they have to take.

Personality: being brave and open

It is worth noting that three interviewees (both male and female Chinese students) particularly pointed out they would not encourage “young female student” (in Chinese 小女孩/生 *xiaonvhai/sheng*) study in Germany, as they referred “too vulnerable” (Sun_PhD, 257-257), “not tough” (Chen_MA, 25-25) and “too young and too weak” (Zhang_MA, 306-306) to indicate their worries about those students, most female students, who haven’t experienced difficulty in China might have difficulty in dealing with the difficulty. In addition, interviewees also emphasized the importance of having an open attitude or extroversive personality. The above assertions don’t mean that those students who are shy or introversive should never go abroad,²⁷⁶ instead, it indicates that Chinese students realized the importance of such strong personality in the academic adjustment; therefore they encouraged students to bravely have a try. Often in communicating with German students or lecturers, Chinese students keep silent, as they worry too much about their German language.

Making effort to improve the situation

It is important to point out that personal engagement is an important factor influencing Chinese students’ academic adjustment in Germany. Take the German language learning as an example, German language facilitates academic adjustment of Chinese students, in terms of understanding others and expressing oneself at class. One important effort that Chinese students made is keeping on learning German language. Results indicate that 53.7% of participants in all three studies keep on learning German language.

Part-time job

Since a large number of Chinese students are self-funding students, they often do a part-time job to finance their own study. Whether doing a part-time job affects their study?

²⁷⁶ For example, one piece of news described how one Chinese student studying in Australia made effort to change his character: the Chinese boy was very shy when he first arrived in Australia. Although he had prepared for the presentation for one month and recited every sentence, being too nervous, he forgot everything suddenly when he stood on the stage. He felt sorry for that and decided to make a change: he created many practices for himself. For example, on the bus, he tried to choose those seats that passengers have to sit face to face. By doing so, he made effort to look into others eyes and conquered the shyness. Such practices made him gradually become brave. Retrieved May 31, 2012, from People’s Daily (Overseas Edition) http://news.xinhuanet.com/overseas/2012-05/31/c_123216588_2.htm

The results of the interviews indicate that some Chinese students invest some time in doing a part-time job; therefore, it has little negative effect on their study in Germany.

First, the motivation is to decrease financial burden of their parents. The majority of Chinese students are self-funded students and their motivation of doing a part-time job was to ask for less financial support from their parents.

My family can afford my expenses of studying in Germany, but I feel it is a shame that as an adult I still have to ask money from my parents.
(Wan_MA, 37-37)

In addition, some Chinese students regarded doing a part-time job as an important experience of studying abroad, instead of simply making money (Jia_MA, 203-208). Interviewees admitted that one important reason to have a part-time job was out of curiosity, as taking part-time job belongs to the experience of studying abroad.

I have heard that how hard the overseas Chinese students working in a Chinese restaurant abroad. At that time, I was looking forward to have such experience as well. (Zhou_MA, 75-75)

Second, the part-time job is mainly labor work. It is common that Chinese students, shortly after arrival, were only able to find manual labor in Germany, as their German language proficiency was not good enough for demanding job. Working as waiter in a Chinese restaurant (Wan_MA), as shop assistant in a Chinese/Asian shops (Cao_MA and Chen_MA), or doing housekeeping/ cleaning work at hotels (Zhou_MA and Zhang_MA), tour guide (Sun_PhD), or worker in factories (Cao_MA and Zhang_MA) are common to Chinese students. Later, with better German language proficiency, some found jobs as translator (Sun_PhD) or research assistant (Zhou_MA) at universities or non-university institutions.

Third, Chinese students settle some principles for doing a part-time job. They had a clear mind that part-time job should not be purely manual work and searched part-time job which had to do with their academic disciplines.

I only took research-oriented part-time job, for example, HiWi²⁷⁷ or Internship. Aachen is actually a paradise for doing a part-time job, as we have two big companies producing computers. But I have never worked there. My philosophy is -- if the job is only manual labor, I should save the time and try to finish the study as early as possible. [...] I can earn more and do more demanding work after graduation. (Fan_Graduate, 68-73)

²⁷⁷ HiWi is the abbreviation of Wissenschaftliche Hilfskraft. HiWi is a research assistant employed by a researcher and assists him in academic research.

At the very beginning, I did some manual work, but I was very clear that one does part-time job not only aiming at making money. One should do something that promotes his academic development as well. I know that every self-funded student needs money, but one should always bear the purpose of coming to Germany in mind. If necessary, one should still turn to parents for help. (Sun_PhD, 163-163)

Fourth, Chinese students admitted that the part-time job had negative effect on their study (Fan_Graduate and Zhang_MA). In addition, one interviewee pointed out that “one only has 24 hours per day. If he spends more time in doing a part-time job, he will have less time in resting and studying. Because of this, I gave up the part-time job” (Chen_MA, 131-131). In the meantime, one Chinese student also pointed out that doing a part-time job provided her with an opportunity to have the link with the German society, instead of being a guest.

It is necessary to mention, when doing a part-time job, one achieves the feeling that he has a closer relationship with Germany: as one is no longer a guest, instead, he participates in the production of Germany. (Jia_MA, 208-208)

6.2 Recommendations for individual and institutional

Mahr and Peroz (2001) hold that international students have different academic demand and needs at different periods of time studying abroad; hosting countries and universities should make efforts to satisfy their requirement. They further put forward the five-phase-model²⁷⁸ for supporting international students studying in Germany. Inspired by this model, the following part makes suggestions not only to German universities, but also to Chinese students.

6.2.1 In the preparation phase

To Chinese students: enriching knowledge about Germany and German universities

International students formed general picture of the host country in the pre-departure period (Klein et al., 1971). Although sojourners cannot be completely prepared for every eventuality in another culture (Hughes-Wiener, 1986), Kim (1988) emphasized the importance of sojourners' preparedness for change, or psychological 'readiness' and

²⁷⁸ Mahr and Peroz (2001) separated the process of studying abroad into five phases, namely, Phase 1—preparation in the home country; Phase 2—preparation for the study in Germany; Phase 3—at the beginning of the overseas study; Phase 4—during the study; and Phase 5—end phase of studying abroad.

informational familiarity with the host culture facilitates the adaptive potential (p.135). Holmes (2004) called on “better preparation for the reality shock they encountered in the new learning environment” (p.304).

First, it is necessary for Chinese students to grasp a certain level of knowledge about Germany in the preparation phase. Brown and Holloway (2008) found students who did not report “feeling lost” in the new culture had done preparatory reading about life in the host country before arrival. Kim (1988) suggested “knowledge about the host communication systems, particularly language, and about relevant norms, rules, customs, history and art as well as economic, social, and political institutions” (p.135). Nevertheless, results of this study indicated that very few Chinese students know well about Germany. Chinese students did pay attention to the general information in the phase of pre-departure; nevertheless, the short period of preparation only enable them to manage the daily life-oriented (e.g., accommodation) information. Aich (1962) pointed out that many international students even had a false Germany-image before departure (1962).

Second, it is necessary to attach more importance to the preparation for the academic-oriented information. Since they were busy with learning German language and managing the application to the German universities simultaneous, they were not able to spend some time in getting familiar with German culture, and later met big challenge in “landing” in German universities. Peroz (2008) suggested that coming from an educational system that is quite different from that of Germany, international students (especially those coming from developing countries) lack prior knowledge of learning method in Germany. The analysis part indicates that a large number of Chinese students were not familiar with Germany or German universities. The result in the initial phase further demonstrates the consequence of the hurried preparation.

Third, it is significant to fully realize the importance of the German language. One Chinese student suggested “prospect Chinese student should try their best to put more energy in learning German language in China. The better their German language skill is, the fewer problems they will meet in Germany” (Jing_MA, 98-98). Furthermore, it is necessary to point out, compared with engineering or natural science students, students majoring in social science are expected to have a better command of German language. Students major in engineering or natural science can depend on the symbols or formulas on the blackboard as a bridge to understand the knowledge; while to social science majors, at lectures, they have to have a good “ears” to catch and understand the knowledge (Wan_MA). Lin (2002) similarly pointed that the lack of cultural knowledge or understanding particularly confronts Chinese students in social science.

Fourth, it is necessary for some students to take a preparation course. To Chinese students who feel uncertain about their German language, it is better for them to attend a preparation course (in German: *Propädeutikum* or *Vorbereitungskurs*) at German universities before starting the formal study. Several German universities offer

prospective international students a combined preparation course (German language and basic subject-specific), aiming at helping international students to improve the German language skill and subject-specific knowledge (e.g. mathematics for economic students), to get familiar with terminology, so that to have a successful study at German universities.²⁷⁹ One Chinese student having attending the course agreed he benefited from the course:

At the very beginning of the master study, I had the feeling that I adjusted to the new environment faster than other Chinese students. For example, I was informed of the forms of courses and when I should take down some notes. Although I still encounter some difficulties, without the course, the situation would have been more difficult. (Chen_MA, 91-91).

Fifth, it is to have a rational expectation of studying in Germany. One interviewee suggested that it is important to have a realistic expectation.

Prospect students should not expect that everything will get better when they arrive in Germany. If he does so, he will definitely get disappointed. [...] To those who have little self-confidence, such sense of disappointment is risky and dangerous. (Chen_MA, 125-125)

It is crucial that one has a rational understanding of studying abroad, namely, one should be familiar with educational system in Germany. In addition, one should expect the difficulty before coming here. (Cao_MA, 334-334)

One should realize the purpose of studying abroad is to study, but not to “play”. (Pang_MA, 244-246)

To German universities: making the introduction more available to Chinese students

The first step for German universities to take is to encourage Chinese students to read the first-hand information. A substantial number of German universities supply the coming international students with information in details.²⁸⁰ On the website of international office, international students can find necessary information concerning application and admission (e.g. language requirement), upon departure (e.g. applying for a visa and finding accommodation in Germany), and on arrival (e.g. “airport pick-up

²⁷⁹ At some universities, courses are free for international students who have registered in this university. For example, the Technical University of Berlin offers free preparation courses for international students. Retrieved May 22, 2012, from

http://www.studienkolleg.tu-berlin.de/menue/serviceangebot/vorbereitungskurs_propaedeutikum/

²⁸⁰ Generally speaking, international students have easy access to the information provided by International Office. Important information provided by international office is available under the channel of “international(s)” on the homepage of the university.

service”, “newcomer service”²⁸¹ and orientation courses). Unfortunately, most Chinese students didn’t use this first-hand information. According to the interviewees, they didn’t know the link of such information; some of them complained they had difficulty in reading all the information in German. This result suggests the importance of encouraging Chinese students to read and take advantage of such information specifically designed to facilitate their adjustment. For example, the admission office can send Chinese students, together with the admission letter, a brochure in PDF format. According to the interviews, with the admission letter, Chinese students do receive some information concerning daily life in Germany; nevertheless, they expect to be informed of some necessary information/knowledge about German universities as well, for example:

University has informed us of the tips or suggestions of preparing the daily life in Germany, which is really helpful. It would be even better if we could have received specific information concerning the study in Germany. Except for the letter of admission, we didn’t receive any information.
(Wan_MA, 98-102)

The second step for German universities to take is to present the information in an efficient way. Concerning the fact that many international students are still not fluent in German, international office had better simplify the language and present the information in an efficient way, so that international students can immediately find and understand the message. Furthermore, since there are a large number of English-speaking international master programs and doctoral research programs available, crucial information should also be available in English. The fingerpost of the international office of Julius-Maximilians-Universität Würzburg is a good example (see Figures 6-6). First of all, the location of international office is demonstrated in the form of a graph, which is vivid and easy to understand to non-German speakers. Second, the most important information is demonstrated in English. To non-German speakers, they would also have some interest to read further information.

²⁸¹ For instance, the international office of the University of Bremen provides “Newcomer Service”. Retrieved July 3, 2012 from <http://www.uni-bremen.de/en/international/ways-to-the-university-of-bremen/newcomer-service.html>

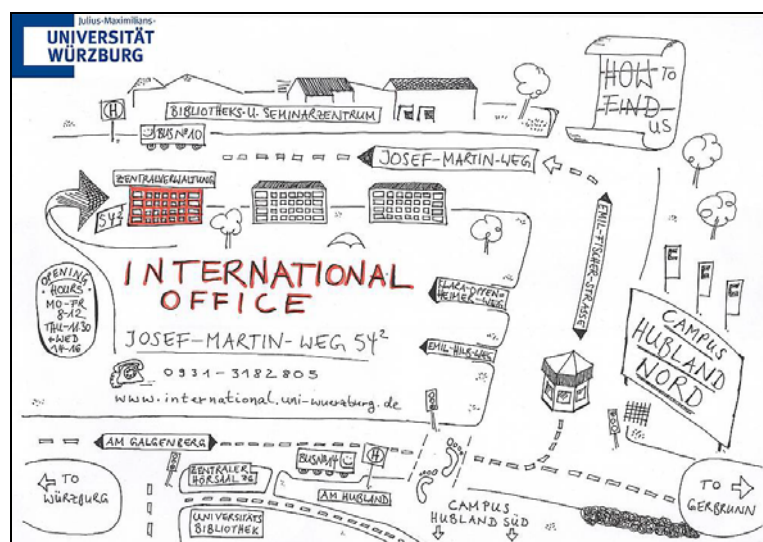


Figure 6-7: Fingerpost of the international office of Julius-Maximilians-Universität Würzburg
Source: International Office, Julius-Maximilians-Universität Würzburg ²⁸²

The third step is to make further information or help available to better respond the demand of Chinese students. After successfully applying to the German universities, Chinese students begin to start preparing their journey to Germany. For them, the issue at the top of the list is to find an accommodation in Germany. Unlike the situation at Chinese universities that every student will be provided with accommodation, at German universities, students have to find a room by themselves. New coming Chinese students often go to the international office to find a room. To some universities with a relative small number of international students, international office is able to arrange a room in the student dormitory for the newcomers; while not every international office can guarantee such service. Some Chinese students complained that the first answer they got from the international office was “Sorry, there is no empty room in the student dormitory now and we cannot help you any further. You have to find a room by yourself”. Chinese students were frustrated to hear this, as they regarded the help from international office as the most important source of help. As foreigners, who have no knowledge of finding accommodation, they would appreciate if the staff in the international office could at least give some further information such as the portal for short-term accommodation or other alternatives.

6.2.2 In the initial phase

In retrospect, we notice that initial experience in Germany is the most difficult and helpless to the majority Chinese students. In this period, Chinese students need to learn the foreign language, get familiar with the new learning environment, acquire the new

²⁸²The above figure is retrieved from the website of international office of Julius-Maximilians-Universität Würzburg. Retrieved June 1, 2012, from <http://www.international.uni-wuerzburg.de>

academic knowledge, and communicate with the students and lecturers and fellow students at universities. The research indicated that a “hard landing” in German universities, to some extent, is due to a hurried and hasty pre-departure preparation. In the initial journey of academic adjustment, Chinese students meet enormous academic challenge, which causes stress and frustration. Because of that, it is urgent to buffer the challenge caused by the hard landing.

To Chinese students: ready for the new learning expectation

First, it is necessary for Chinese students to identify the difference between German and Chinese universities and quickly establish support network. In the initial phase, Chinese students encounter grave difficulties in terms of getting familiar with new forms of courses and new academic task. The transfer from learning in China to learning in Germany requires Chinese students to perceive the academic discrepancy between China and Germany, make necessary modification according to the new requirement, and try to deal with the difficulty by finding resources available. Interviewees often reported that they felt “at a loss”, as they haven’t found any solutions or resources to deal with the problem. Facing the difference, they were overwhelmed.

Second, it is significant for Chinese students to continue learning German language, which facilitates the initial difficulties. Based on the result of the interviews, one of the biggest challenges for Chinese students in the initial phase of academic adjustment is the German language. Chinese students have difficulty in understanding the lecturers and expressing themselves at class. Because of this, it is indispensable to continue the German language. In spite of the fact that most of them have passed the standard German test, it is still far from enough to catch the process at class. Many interviewees strongly suggested future students to attach great importance to the German language learning, which was regarded as a “protracted war” (in Chinese 持久战 or *chijiuzhan*).

Third, it is important to develop strategy to deal with the challenge. The interviewees indicated strategies that Chinese students use to solve the problems is either deal with it alone or turn to other Chinese students for help, as they haven’t identified or established supportive network at the university shortly after beginning the study at German universities. Furthermore, Chinese students didn’t ask lecturers or fellow German students for help, as they are not confident of their German language and are too shy to have a try.

Fourth, holding a positive attitude and keeping (self-) confident in facing the difficulty. Based on the interview, we can find that Chinese students encounter enormous difficulty in the initial phase: they became unconfident and regarded themselves as a disadvantage group in Germany. Nevertheless, such frustrating feeling and emotion might “become a milestone of an individual’s life story, marking the moment of greatest crisis and despair but also the turning point of a new start” (Griffiths, Winstanley, & Gabriel, 2005, p.277). Facing the failures they have made, it is important

for Chinese students to “see the process instructively as learning process rather than defensively. Failures, when they are not devastating, [...] are often far more informative than successes” (Kim, 1988, p.169). When one looks back, the difficulty which seems to be a no formidable obstacle at that time is easy to deal with. For instance, when asked their learning experience in Germany, Chinese students who were at the final phase of their study in Germany, seem to regard the difficulty less serious as those who were still in the initial or developing phase.

To German universities: providing orientation courses, intercultural training, and establish mentor- or buddy-programs

First, it is necessary to increase the effect and efficiency of orientation courses. German universities are aware of the difficulty that challenge international students and provide orientation courses at both university-level and faculty-level, to facilitate their learning experience in Germany. Such orientation courses inform newcomers about the campus life and the academic issues. Nevertheless, Chinese students either had low attendance rate or failed to obtain important information at orientation course, because of the limited language proficiency. The result of the interviews indicated that the orientation course is not very efficient and useful for the academic adjustment of Chinese students. Hence, universities should emphasize the importance of the orientation course to the incoming students; in the meantime, the organizer of the orientation course should take the German level of Chinese students, as well as other international students, into consideration and provide more visual materials (e.g. showing PowerPoint slide accompanying the oral introduction or giving handout) for explaining the *Modul-System* at the orientation course. Furthermore, the length of the course should be well planned. Since there is a substantial amount of information to deliver at the orientation course, new students will receive more information at an orientation week than an orientation day. This is particular important to international students, who need more time to get familiar with the campus. In the meantime, the basic discipline-based skill should also be included to the orientation courses at the faculty-wide. Nevertheless, very few interviewees mentioned that their faculty had particularly provided them with any academic-oriented course (with the introduction of Modul), in addition to the campus life-oriented courses. To Chinese students, both academic-oriented course and the campus life-orientation are important.

Second, to provide intercultural training. The result indicates that the majority of interviewees²⁸³ are the first ones in their families who have ever gone abroad and they didn't have much intercultural experience before coming to Germany. Because of this, many Chinese students encounter some problems and failures at German universities, which is actually due to a lack of the necessary cultural skills and knowledge (Furnham

²⁸³ Some interviewees who majored in German language and literature indicated that they had some contact with native German lecturers or students in China. Through the communication/ interaction, they had accumulated some experience in communicating with German people. In addition, two interviewees have been to Germany as exchange students.

& Bochner, 1982). In this case, intercultural training is necessary to enhance their intercultural knowledge and competence. A large number of German universities exert themselves to establish intercultural training courses for both international and domestic students. For example, Humboldt-Universität of Berlin offers international students an intercultural training course called “Kultur- und Studienorientierung für internationale Studierende” (KUSTOS) since 2004, and Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich provides domestic students with intercultural courses. Through role-play, team working or discussion, students learn how to deal with the cultural conflict (Haerdle, 2010). Another important issue is the communication at universities. This research indicates that very few Chinese students ask German lecturers or fellow students for help. In addition to the language difficulty, they also lack necessary intercultural communicative skill in the context of university-wide communication. For example, although they know the channel of obtaining academic help (e.g. lecturers or tutors are available at office hour), they don’t know how to approach to them. In the meantime, the language training centers at the university can also play an important role in helping Chinese students, as well as other international students in Germany, to prove their academic writing and reading skills.

Third, to organize effective mentor- or buddy-programs. In order to help international students to find academic discipline-specific orientation, a large number of German universities have established such academic discipline-specific mentor program. Such discipline-specific supervision program is between a mentor (a senior student) and an international student. The mentor and the international student are often in the same faculty, and meet regularly to help the international student to solve the discipline-based problem. For instance, *Famos Fachmentoren-Programm* at Humboldt-Universität of Berlin, *Studienstart International* at University of Cologne, *StudentService@School* at University of Bremen, just to name a few, have shown initiatives and offer international students the mentor program.

In addition to the mentor program, more universities organize some buddy-programs. Based on the result of this research, Chinese students mention that they are longing for more interaction with German students; nevertheless, they fail to establish friends-circle with domestic students quickly. Furthermore, Chinese students mentioned that they were too shy to take the initiative in making friends with German students and surprisingly realized that their German counterparts were also hesitating to take the first step. In this case, in terms of the buddy-program, the university should play a role in encouraging friendship between two sides, as internationalization and the presence of international students at campus doesn’t “automatically lead to intercultural contacts and intercultural learning experiences” (Otten, 2003, p.14). The result of the interview indicates the buddy-program is effective, only if both sides have strong interest in knowing others’ culture or language: one needs motivation in investing time in doing such buddy-program. One suggestion is to find the suitable target. For example, those

German students who plan to study/ have studied in China or those who are learning the Chinese language would have some interest to make friends with Chinese students.

Fourth, it is important for lecturers to show understanding and encouragement, this would also facilitate the academic adjustment in the initial phase. For instance, at the beginning of the semester, one interviewee told the lecturer that he had some language difficulties, the lecturer comforted him by saying that this would be solved gradually, based on his previous interaction with Chinese students. On the country, interviewees also indicated the discovery that their lecturer could not understand them made them feel frustrated. Since Chinese students have become the largest international student group in Germany in the last decade, many German lecturers do not know the learning style and previous learning tradition of Chinese students very well. In this case, some German lecturers might feel confusing about Chinese students' learning style. Interviewees indicated that those German lecturers with overseas experience could better understand them. Facing the increasing number of international at class, some lecturers need some intercultural communication training, to understand Chinese/international students, and then develop some intercultural competence or enhance the cultural sensibility/ awareness to facilitate their communicate with Chinese/ international students. Cortazzi and Jin (1997) called for developing staff and students' intercultural skills by enhancing "both learning to communicate across cultures and communicating for learning across cultures" (p.76). Furthermore, the attitude of German lecturers toward the presence of Chinese and other international students at class also plays the role. Holmes (2004) suggested "teachers to move from the mind-set of a *deficit* to a *difference* view of Chinese learning and teaching methods" (p.304). Moreover, lecturers should encourage the cooperation between Chinese and German students, both at and off class.

6.2.3 In the developing phase

To Chinese students: ready to make a change

With the progress in German language and knowledge about the German universities, not many Chinese students particularly emphasized the difficulty in the developing phase of the academic adjustment. According to the interview, one challenge for them is to negotiate with the difference between their traditional learning style/ belief and the current academic requirement in the German learning environment. Compared with the initial phase, Chinese students realize what is expected and valued at German universities, for instance, "One lesson I have learned in Germany is to take the initiative" (Jing_MA, 98-98); in spite of that, they still need some courage to make a change. For example, they realize that asking question at office hour is important, but they are still hesitating to do so. Interviewees strongly recommend the coming Chinese

students to increase communication with others, which will help them to better understand the German universities and Germany.

To German universities: providing writing or reading course

First, it is important to organize academic writing or reading course for social science students. This result of this research indicates: compared with natural science and engineering students, Chinese students majoring in social science are expected to have a better command of reading and writing skills. In the interview, they mentioned that they needed to have some courses for training their basic writing and reading skill. The language center of the university should play an important role. In addition, certain social science faculties can organize some extra reading and writing course for international students.

Second, it is necessary to help Chinese students majoring in social science to develop basic academic skills. Chinese students realized that compared with their German counterparts, as well as international students from other European countries, they lack some academic-based skills (e.g. academic writing, reading, and doing presentations). Chinese students (Wan_MA and Fang_BA) emphasized that such basic training might sound “ridiculous”, “childish” or “absurd” (in Chinese 小儿科 or *xiaoerke*) to their German counterpart, while it is particularly important to them.

Third, lecturers should modify pedagogical approach, according to the characteristics of Chinese/international students. Not only Chinese/international students should make effort to change their learning style in order to participate in an intercultural classroom well, but the lecturers should exert themselves to integrate Chinese students into the classroom as well. No wonder, such change is sometimes very demanding to lecturers. It depends on their “tolerance to otherness and different styles” (Otten, 2003, p.14), their intercultural competence, and their pedagogical skill. For example, one lecturer in the interview mentioned that “Compared with German students, Chinese students are strong in memorizing the definition, while weak in analyzing the text. In designing the questions of the test, I can arrange the balance of number of questions of ‘definition’ and ‘text-analysis’, so as to let both German and Chinese have the chance to take advantage of their strength” (Lecture 1, 11-11).

6.2.4 In the final phase

To Chinese students

Obviously, the important task for Chinese students in the last phase of their academic adjustment is to write thesis and search for a job or internship. First, it is important that Chinese students consult lecturers and supervisor, when they meet some difficulty in writing the thesis. Based on the experience shared by interviewees, Chinese students need some academic help in writing the thesis. Second, they need to get ready for the graduation. To those who plan to go back to China, they need get ready for the re-integration or readjustment, so as to the difficulty of re-adjust to the home country; to those who decide to work in Germany, they need to get prepared for the transfer from being a foreign student to being an international employee.

To German universities

The focus for German universities in the final phase of the academic adjustment is to facilitate Chinese students to manage the academic adjustment in the last phase. First, German universities should offer seminar and colloquium for writing thesis. According to those Chinese students who are at the last phase, they met some difficulties in writing their theses. Actually, not only international students, but also domestic students meet some difficulty in writing the thesis (in terms of the research method, format of thesis); therefore, some faculties organized some seminars or colloquiums to help all students who are writing thesis. Such seminar or colloquium aims at helping the students is often led by an experienced academic staff. Second, German universities need to provide Chinese students with job and internship information. Compared with the domestic students, Chinese students might not be familiar with the job market in Germany. One interview (Lee_MA) mentioned that she needed help from lecturers or faculty in terms of searching for an internship.

6.3 Reflection

The journey is the reward.

— *proverb*

6.3.1 Academic adjustment is a dynamic process

First, Chinese students' academic adjustment in Germany is a cyclical, recursive and dynamic process. In different phase of academic adjustment, Chinese students meet different challenges. The result of this research indicates that Chinese students, like international students from other countries, have the potential to adjust to the new

academic environment, make gradual progress, and finally achieve educational growth and personal development.

Second, every Chinese student has his or her own paces and speed in the academic adjustment. It is impossible to depict “THE academic adjustment of Chinese students in Germany”, as academic adjustment of Chinese students varies, according to the background, personal and situational factors. Sojourners demonstrate different degrees, modes, and levels of adaptation (Anderson, 1994). Furthermore, Kim (1988) succinctly put it “not all individuals are equally successful in making transitions toward adaptation” (p.58). The results of interviews indicate some Chinese students quickly understood the German learning expectation, which was different that in China and made modification accordingly to meet the requirement; while others needed more time to figure out the problem of academic adjustment.

6.3.2 Academic adjustment is a ability of learning in an intercultural environment

It might be much easier for Chinese students to learn everything at German universities from the very beginning, if they had not been influenced by the previous learning experience. Nevertheless, such process of confusion and negotiation, to some extent, stimulates Chinese students to experience and later understand the difference between the two countries. In addition, we discuss the academic adjustment as “fit or not fit”, instead of judging “better or worse”.

In the meantime, it is crucial to note that adjustment to German universities doesn't mean that Chinese students have to abolish the Chinese learning tradition and act as German students; on the contrary, the academic adjustment stimulates Chinese students “learn how to learn” (Hughes-Wiener, 1986, p.485) in an intercultural academic milieu, through supplementing and making improvement of the previous understanding in the Chinese learning environment. Instead of sticking to the original Chinese learning tradition or change to German style, Chinese students are expected to develop a new strategy to fulfill the task according to the academic requirements. Ehlers and Hemmingsen (2011) described such process of combining one's “first” academic culture with his “second” to develop a “third” “transnational academic culture” (p.39).

Scholars highly valued such learning ability in intercultural situations. For instance, international students learn “being critical but respectful of other academic cultures and opinions (Ehlers & Hemmingsen, 2011, p.39), which is “more complex and stressful than learning in one's home culture” (Hughes-Wiener, 1986, p.493). It is an important experience stimulating “personal expansion” or “an opening of one's potential universe” (Murphy-Lejeune, 2003, p.113). Murphy-Lejeune (2003) depicts the experience of adaptation and learning abroad as “a maturing process” (p.113). In the

process of academic adjustment, Chinese students are “pushed” to the development of a broadened perspective on learning. Kaczmarek et al. (1994) further suggested that most “international students have realistic self-perceptions about their ability to adjust to the college environment (p.246).

It is important to mention that all the participants of this research had volunteered to take part in the research (both interviews and questionnaire) in all three studies. Especially the interviewees, the author obtained the agreements from most of interviewee and luckily had received very few refusals. They did want to share their “true stories” (which might even show their embarrassing experience) with the author, who is a stranger to them. The initiatives alone indicate that they have an open mind and hold a positive attitude to the outside world.

6.3.3 Universities/faculties need to enhance an opening learning environment

Since “[...] new cross-border programs typically follow the structure of the provider’s home country and may or may not be compatible with the education system, cultural norms, or labor-market requirements of the host country” (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009, p.32), it has been long regarded that international students, instead of the universities of the host country, should make more effort to change themselves. However, Smith and Smith (1999) warned that such concept “runs the danger of being new colonialists who assume that the organisational, knowledge and belief structures that we develop in the English speaking West will transfer without adaptation to another culture” (p.77).

Regarding this, as long as Germany adopts the policy of recruiting more international students, German universities have the responsibility to facilitate international students’ academic adjustment. Holmes (2004) called on to create a better intercultural learning environment, in order to “facilitate intercultural communication among Chinese and other international students and host students” (p.294).

At the same time, whether German universities would create an opening learning environment depends on its attitude of regarding presence of international students at campus as a challenge/burden or as a change/opportunity? The former attitude prefers a “monocultural, monodisciplinary, and monolingual” (Otten, 2003, p.14) learning environment and regards the recruitment of international students as a trouble. It is understandable that academic faculty will have extra working load to take care of international students. The latter attaches great importance to build an intercultural learning environment and enhance the diversity at German universities. The results of the interviews indicate that lecturers’ and peer German students’ support plays a role in supporting Chinese students’ academic adjustment at the German universities, the

university's philosophy and idea of encouraging and facilitating an opening and cultural diverse environment contributes tremendously to the academic adjustment.

6.4 Conclusions

This part summarizes the findings of Chinese students' academic adjustment at German universities and points out both the strength and limitation of the research. In addition, suggestions for the further research will be mentioned.

6.4.1 Summary of the findings

Compared with the current literature on international students, most findings in this dissertation are in accordance with the previous results concerning international/Chinese students studying abroad.

First of all, Chinese students studying in Germany demonstrate different features in four phases: pre-departure, initial, developing, and final phases. Inspired by Anderson's "Affective, Cognitive, and Behavioral Model", this research probes Chinese students' academic adjustment in Germany from these three dimensions.

This research found that a good preparation in the pre-departure phase facilitates Chinese students' academic adjustment in the initial period. The results reveal that the majority of Chinese students, except for preparing the German language (attending training and tests) and general "survival" or daily life-oriented information (weather, food, traffic, etc.), have relative little knowledge about Germany (German culture or history) and the academic-oriented information (types of the courses, academic tasks, assessment methods, etc.). The main reason is most Chinese students only leave a short period of time for themselves for preparing studying in Germany.

Such underprepared state directly leads to the "hard landing" in the initial phase. Chinese students encounter much difficulty arriving in Germany. The first semester was perceived by many interviewees as "catastrophe" or "chaos", as they were not familiar with the academic-oriented information in Germany at all. Facing such difficulty, they feel "at a loss"; at the same time, the discovery that their lecturers showing little understanding to their foreign students' identity make them feel misunderstood. As newcomers, Chinese students are not familiar with the on-campus academic support system; therefore, they can only rely on themselves or co-national Chinese friends to deal with the problems.

In the developing phase, Chinese students reported progress in German language; in addition, they become more familiar with the types of courses, academic tasks, and

assessment at German universities. Both these two factors facilitate their further development. One of the challenges in the developing phase is to negotiate the difference between their Chinese educational tradition and the current academic expectation at German universities. It is frustrating for Chinese students to find what they once regard correctly in the Chinese learning environment turning out wrong or unexpected in the German one. They try asking lecturers, tutors, fellow students to solve the difficulty.

In the final phase, Chinese students show understanding and appreciation to the expectation at German universities. For instance, in the initial phase, Chinese students often complain “nobody takes care of me” and report great difficulty in participating the seminar (either participating in the discussion or giving a presentation). However, in the final phase, they regard such “nobody takes care of me” as “academic freedom”, and show appreciation to the seminar and regard it as an active type of course at German universities. The whole process of academic adjustment expects Chinese students to identify the difference, understand the difference, and later appreciate the difference.

Last, but not the least, throughout the above process learning at German universities, background (German language competence in academic knowledge), situational (academic support, student identity, and intercultural communication with peer students), and personal factors (personality, personal effort, and part-time job) together exert influence on the Chinese students’ academic adjustment at German universities.

6.4.2 Evaluation of this thesis

Strength and limitation

Strength. First, to the best of the author’s knowledge, among surveys concerning Chinese students’ learning experience in Germany, this study first explores Chinese students’ academic adjustment in Germany using a mixed cross-sectional and longitudinal method. Regarding adjustment as a dynamic process, the former method provides an overview of the learning experience of Chinese students majoring different subjects (social science, natural science, and engineering), pursuing different academic degrees (bachelor, master, and doctoral degree), spending different lengths of time in Germany (some interviewees newly arrived in Germany and others spent several semesters in Germany); while the latter follows Chinese students’ German language development and experience at German universities within over two semesters.

Second, this research pays substantial attention to Chinese students’ pre-departure phase. Academic adjustment starts as early as the phase in the home country; nevertheless, a large number of studies have not shown much concern to this period and regarded their arrival in the host country as the beginning of adjustment. Considering

the importance of the pre-departure phase, this research pays special attention to the application, motivation, and readiness (soft and hard skill) for the study in Germany. The results also reveal that all these issues in the pre-departure later have an influence on the initial phase of academic adjustment.

Third, this research achieved the goal of exploring Chinese students' adjustment in an intensive way. So far, previous research conducted on Chinese students in Germany has only asked Chinese students' experience, while their lecturers and fellow students' opinion has not been well studied. Against such background, this research listened to the opinion of both sides attentively. Furthermore, this research used a mixed method to collect data from both qualitative and quantitative way. Previous research often judged Chinese students' adjustment from a psychological perspective by using scales or questionnaires to demonstrate the adjustment. Nevertheless, taken the dynamic process of adjustment into consideration, the qualitative method, such as interview, helps us to understand Chinese students' subjective experience, their perception of the difficulty, their feeling, and how do they deal with problem.

Limitation. This research achieved the goal which has been set as the research design; nevertheless, there is still much to learn about the Chinese students' academic adjustment in Germany. First, samples of Chinese students studying in the University of Applied Sciences (in German: Fachhochschule) have not been concluded; Second, no German student, unfortunately, participated in the research. Taking the importance of domestic students' role in the academic adjustment of international students, their experience with Chinese students is also valuable; actually this topic "has been largely neglected in research on social integration and international education" (Ward, Masgoret, & Gezentsvey, 2009, p.97).

Suggestions for the further research

Based on the finding and research method of this research, there are some suggestions for the further research.

First, longitudinal research should be paid more attention. Adjustment is a long process. To follow the development and process of adjustment, further research might invest a longer period of time (e.g. longer than one year) for doing a longitudinal research. Unfortunately, this research didn't manage to follow one group of Chinese students through their entire study in Germany.

Second, further research should include German students' opinion as well. Although this research intended to interview German students, asking their observation on their Chinese counterparts' learning experience, no German student (in the case study) volunteered to participate in the interview. The future research should exert itself to invite German students who have some contact with the Chinese students to the survey, in order to understand Chinese students' academic adjustment in a peer perspective.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: List of abbreviations

BMBF	Federal Ministry of Education and Research (in German: Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung)
CHC	Confucian heritage culture
DAAD	German Academic Exchange Service (in German: Deutscher Akademische Austauschdienst)
GER	Gross enrolment ratio
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HIS	The Higher Education Information System (in German: HIS Hochschul-Informations-System)
MoE	Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China (in Chinese: 中华人民共和国教育部)

Appendix 2: Definitions of 'International Student' in different countries

The following definitions are specific to national education systems and specify how each included country identifies the 'international student' for the purposes of data collection and the publication of enrolment statistics:

Australia: 'International students' are defined as those studying onshore only with visa subclasses 570 to 575, excluding students on Australian-funded scholarships or sponsorships or students undertaking study whilst in possession of other temporary visas. (Data also exclude students with New Zealand citizenship because they do not require a visa to study in Australia).

Canada: 'Foreign students' are defined as temporary residents who have been approved by an immigration officer to study in Canada. Every 'foreign student' must have a student authorisation, but they may also be in possession of other types of permits or authorisations. (Students do not need a study permit for courses of six months or less if they will finish the course within the period of stay authorised upon entry, which is usually six months.)

France: 'Foreign students' are defined as foreign nationals who travel to France for the purpose of study or long-term or permanent residents in possession of French secondary qualifications and who likely have French residency status. Data thus include students who are long-term or permanent residents without French citizenship in France and overseas territories such as Guadeloupe, Reunion and Martinique (*départements d'outre mer*, or DOM).

Germany: 'Foreign students' are defined as 'mobile foreign students' (*Bildungsausländer*), those who travel to Germany specifically for study, and 'non-mobile foreign students' (*Bildungsinländer*), those in possession of German secondary school qualifications and who likely have German residency status. Data thus include students who are long-term or permanent residents without German citizenship.

Japan: 'International students' are defined as foreign nationals who study at any Japanese university, graduate school, junior college, college of technology, professional training college or university preparatory course on a 'college student' visa, as defined by the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act.

New Zealand: 'International students' are foreign nationals who travel to New Zealand for the purpose of education, and/or are currently studying on a student permit or domestic passport. Data thus exclude students who are permanent residents. (Data also exclude students with Australian citizenship).

United Kingdom: 'International students' are defined as students who are not UK domiciled, and whose normal residence is either in countries which were European Union (EU) members as of 1 December of the reporting period (EU students) or whose normal residence prior to commencing their programmes of study was outside the EU (non-EU students). Data thus exclude students who are permanent residents without British citizenship.

United States: 'Foreign students' are defined as students who are enrolled at institutions of higher education in the US who are not citizens of the US, immigrants or refugees. These may include holders of F (student) visas, H (temporary worker/trainee) visas, J (temporary educational exchange-visitor) visas and M (vocational training) visas. Data thus exclude students who have long-term or permanent residency.

Source: Verbik & Lasanowski, 2007, p.36

Appendix 3: Organizations concerning international students in Germany (in German)

Akteure

Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst (DAAD)

--Einrichtung der deutschen Hochschulen

--Internationalisierung (Deutsche Studierende ins Ausland; Ausländische Studierende nach Deutschland)

--Studentische Mitbestimmung marginal

Bundesverband ausländischer Studierender (BAS e.V.)

--Interessenvertretung

--Ratgeber

--Vernetzung

Studierendenwerke

☐ Wohnheime, Internationale Referate, Kultur

Freier Zusammenschluss der StudentInnenschaften (fzs)

☐ Studentischer Dachverband

☐ Ausschuss Internationales

☐ (Vernetzung Deutschland/Europa/Welt)

Autonome AusländerInnenvertretungen

☐ Finanziell und politisch unabhängig vom AStA

Asten/StruRas/Usten

☐ Meist Internationalismus-Referate

RaSt

☐ Kommunikationsplattform innerhalb des LAT NRW

Source: Weber, 2008

Appendix 4: A list of some empirical research on Chinese overseas students: perspective from the main host countries of Chinese students

Theme of the topics	Methods	No. of Student	Host country
Acculturative stress, maladaptive perfectionism, depression (Wei et al. 2007)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students (Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994) ▪ Maladaptive perfectionism (Slaney et al., 2001) ▪ Depression(Radloff, 1977) 	189	US
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Acculturation ▪ Media use (Yang et al., 2004) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ General media use ▪ Need for acculturation (Rizk, 1986) ▪ Motives for media usage (Reece and Palmgreen, 2000) 	84	US
Experience of acculturation (Burnett & Gardner, 2006)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Interview ▪ Drawing 	40	US
Acculturation and subjective well-being (SWB) (Zheng, Sang, & Wang, 2004)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Acculturation Index (Ward & Kennedy, 1994) ▪ Subjective Well-Being Measures (Pavot & Diener, 1993; Diener et al., 2000) 	157	Australia
Cross-cultural adjustment (Wang, 2009)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Acculturation Strategies (Ward, 1999) ▪ Self-Construals (Cross et al., 2000; Kim & Leung, 1997; Oyserman, 2002; Singelis, 1994; Triandis, 1998) ▪ Perceived Cultural Distance (Babiker et al., 1980) ▪ English Self-Confidence (Clément & Baker, 2001) ▪ Psychological Adjustment (Rosenberg, 1965; Beck & Beck, 1972; Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1998;by the researcher) ▪ Sociocultural Adjustment (Ward & Kennedy,1999) 	177	US
Factors related to the social self-efficacy (Lin & Betz, 2007)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Perceived Social Self-Efficacy (Smith & Betz, 2000), ▪ Unconditional Self-Regard (USRS; Betz, Wohlgemuth, Serling, Harshbarger, & Klein, 1995) ▪ Acculturative Stress (Sandhu &Asrabadi, 1994) ▪ Perceived Level of English Mastery (Barratt & Huba, 1994). 	203	US
Cross-cultural adjustment (Jou & Fukada, 1996a)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Adjustment (selected items from Baker,1981; Uehara, 1988) 	92	Japan
Psychological and sociocultural adjustments (Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Psychological adjustment (Zung, 1965) ▪ Sociocultural Adaptation (Ward & Kennedy, 1999; Ward & Rana-Deuba,1999; Ward & Searle, 1991) Interview 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 126 ▪ 20 	UK
Psychological Adaptation (Zheng & Berry, 1991)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Individual Characteristics ▪ Acculturation attitudes, experience, behaviours ▪ Adaptational Outcome <p>Longitudinal 3 periods: Pre-departure Test, 2 months after arrival, 4 months after arrival Comparison</p>	159	Canada
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Self-ratings of confidence with English, ▪ Indicators of assimilation and psychological adjustment (Pak, Dion, & Dion, 1985) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Demographic variables ▪ Social psychological variables-- self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965); sense of control (Rotter, 1966) ▪ Life satisfaction-- satisfaction with life in Toronto; life satisfaction; happiness;fairness ▪ Perception of prejudice & discrimination ▪ Stress-- Stress symptoms (Langner, 1962);life events (Holmes & Rahe, 1967); life stress; ▪ Attitude toward Chinese --Chinese happiness; ▪ Social distance ▪ Chinese proficiency 	174	Canada

Theme of the topics	Methods	No. of Student	Host country
Trait and state of anxiety (Lin, Endler, & Kocovski, 2001)	Endler Multidimensional Anxiety (Endler et al., 1989, 1991) Comparison	60 Chn. S 60 Can. S	Canada
Adjustment ▪ Social situations, ▪ Motivations, ▪ Expectations ▪ Experiences (Spurling, 2006)	In-depth interviews	19	UK
Adaptation: ▪ Homesickness ▪ mental health (Lu, 1990)	▪ Cognitive failures-- Cognitive Failures Questionnaire (Broadbent et al., 1982) ▪ Locus of control-- Sphere of Control Battery (Paulhus & Christie, 1981) ▪ Academic and social demands ▪ Psychological symptoms --Middlesex Hospital Questionnaire (Broadbent et al., 1984) ▪ Homesickness -- Fisher et al., (1985)	49	UK
Traditional and online support networks in the cross-cultural adaptation (Ye, 2006)	Questionnaire: ▪ Sociocultural adjustment (performance of daily life, such as language, housing, and using local transportation) ▪ Psychological adjustment ▪ Perceived social support from the three social networks ▪ Online Ethnic Social Group Activities	135	US
Stress and social support in mental and physical health (Jou & Fukada, 1997) The causes and influence of transitional stress (Jou & Fukada, 1996c)	▪ Stress (Holmes & Rahe, 1967; Yo & Matsubara, 1990) ▪ Social support (Jou, 1993) ▪ Mental and physical health (Matsuoka, 1990; Ueda, Yosimori, & Yukura, 1992)	175	Japan
Effect of social support on the adjustment (Jou & Fukada, 1995a, 1995b)	▪ Social support (Jou, 1993)* ▪ Adjustment (Baker, 1981)/ (Uehara, 1988)	64/92	Japan
Influences of social supports and personality on adjustment (Jou & Fukada, 1996b) **	▪ Personality (Ezsenck, 1959) ▪ Social support (Jou, 1993) ▪ Adjustment (Baker, 1981; Uehara, 1988) Longitudinal 4 periods (before arrival, 3 months, 9 months, 21 months)	66	Japan
Adaptation to academic culture: (1) financial difficulty; (2) cultural differences; (3) academic concerns; (4) language ability (Feng, 1991)	Ethnographic approach ▪ Participant observation; ▪ Unstructured / semi-structured interviews	52	US
Learning problems and coping strategies (Lin, 2002)	▪ Interview ▪ Participant observation ▪ Course assignments and course syllabus	3	US
Adaptation to learning (Zhang & Xu, 2007)	▪ Interview Longitudinal 4 periods ▪ Prior to the start of class ▪ 2 weeks ▪ Middle of the semester ▪ End of the semester	11	US

Theme of the topics	Methods	No. of Student	Host country
Language anxiety (Cheng & Erben, 2011)	Instrument <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Background questionnaire Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (Horwitz et al., 1986) Interview 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Questionnaire 156 Interview 12 	US
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> English study Academic performance, achievements, and activities Cognitive, learning and thinking styles Personal lives and families (Huang, 1997) 	Case study	6	US
Academic stressor (Yan & Berliner, 2009)	semi-structured interviews	18	US
Stress and coping process (Yan & Berliner, 2011)	Interview		US
Academic Dishonesty (Rawwas, Al-Khatib, & Vitell, 2004)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attitudes toward Academic Dishonesty Comparison 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 166 Chn. S** 291 US. S. 	US
Learning experience (Smith & Smith, 1999)	Approaches to Studying Inventory (including 16 subscale) Comparison	192 Chn. S 202 Aus. S	Australia
Learning experience (Wang & Shan, 2006)	In-depth qualitative interview	10	Australia
Transitional experience (high school in China → high school in Canada → university in Canada) (Li, 2004)	Narrative inquiry <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conversation (group biweekly) Email message Research journal 	4	Canada
Evaluations of an overseas study experience (Simpson & Tan, 2008; Tan & Simpson, 2008)	Qualitative: Discussion Quantitative: Application of importance–performance analysis (Martilla & James, 1977)	160	New Zealand
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learning experience perceptions of education quality, personal and intellectual growths (Campbell & Li, 2007) 	Interview	15 Chn S. (out of)	New Zealand
Reflection of teaching and learning practice (Turner, 2006)	Conversation	9	UK
A Two-Way Reciprocal Adaptation (Zhou & Todman, 2008) Patterns of adaptation (Zhou & Todman, 2009) Intercultural adaptation of Chinese postgraduate Students and their UK Tutors (Zhou, Topping, &	Questionnaire <ul style="list-style-type: none"> language problems, regional accents, different food, travel difficulty, financial problems, finding accommodation, reading academic books, understanding lectures, finding friends 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 257 	UK

Theme of the topics	Methods	No. of Student	Host country
Jindal-Snape, 2011)	<u>In-depth interview</u> Comparison ²⁸⁴	▪ 28	
Intercultural adaption process between Chinese students and their British lecturers and fellow students (Zhao, 2007)	Ethnographic ▪ participant observation, ▪ interview questionnaire ▪ documentary analysis Comparison		
Learning experience (Academic norms of critical thinking in classroom debate and assignment writing) (Durkin, 2008)	In-depth interviews (ground theory+ case study) Longitudinal 6 interviews (approximately monthly) Comparison	23 (out of 42 Asian S.)	UK
Learning Experiences and Learning Beliefs (Wang, 2009) Adjusting to western approaches to teaching and learning (Wang & Byram, 2011)	▪ Participant observation ▪ Observation in the field ▪ Ethnographic interviews Longitudinal 3 points / 10 months	14	
Attitudes towards academic study (Stephens, 1997)	Written comments of 12 visiting Chinese scholars	12	UK
Cultural and educational adaptation (Zhou, 2009)			
Learning experience (Skyrme, 2007)	Interviews Longitudinal ▪ 3 interviews/ 1 st Semester ▪ interview/ End of the 2 nd Semester	2	New Zealand
Adaptation to the teaching and learning culture. (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2006)	▪ Questionnaire ▪ Interview		
Adaptation to the new learning and living environment (Gu, 2008)	▪ Questionnaire (reactions to university, their teachers, their life as a student, and their ability to organise their work and life) ▪ Interview Comparison	▪ 163 ▪ 13 + 2 groups	UK
Language learning strategies (Gao, 2005)	Interview	14	UK
▪ Academic cultural expectations ▪ Second language use (Jin, 1992)	▪ Questionnaire ▪ Interview		UK
Critical management education to Chinese students studying in UK (Choo, 2007)	Interview	26	UK
Perceptions of examination Formats on their Learning (Tait, 2010)	<u>Quantitative:</u> R-SPQ-2f (Biggs <i>et al.</i> , 2001) <u>Qualitative:</u> follow-up interviews	▪ 93 ▪ 18	New Zealand
▪ Norms Vs change ▪ Classroom dynamics ▪ Surface or deep approaches to learning (Feng, 2009)	▪ Ethnographic interviews/informal conversation ▪ Observations of classroom behaviour ▪ E-Form posting by lecturers	21	UK
particular learning strategies	Interview	▪ Chn. S. 6	Canada

²⁸⁴ Both research is part of a larger longitudinal study conducted by Zhou (2006). The number of academic staff participated in the research in 2008 was 33; in 2011 was 26. Article published in 2008 did not include the academic staff.

Theme of the topics	Methods	No. of Student	Host country
developed to adjust to academic culture	Comparison	▪ Can. T. 4	
Intercultural interpersonal relationships (Chen, 2004)	▪ In-depth interview ▪ participant observation	4	US
▪ amount of social contact with locals ▪ the students' threat appraisals regarding such contact	▪ Social contact with local people (Biernat & Crandall, 1994; Spencer-Rodgers, 2001) ▪ Threat appraisal of intercultural contact (Gallagher, 1990; Mak et al., 2004) ▪ Depressive symptoms (Radloff, 1977)	93	Australia
▪ Intercultural communication experience (Holmes, 2008)	Interview	▪ 14 Chn. S. ▪ 10 NZ. S.	New Zealand
▪ Learning ▪ Communication (Holmes, 2006)	▪ Interview ▪ Follow-up focus groups	15	New Zealand
intercultural communication experiences in a classroom context (Holmes, 2005)	▪ naturalistic inquiry (observation, interviews, and informal meetings) ▪ ethnographic description ▪ interpretation	13	
Negotiating differences in learning and intercultural communication (Holmes, 2004)	Ethnographic ▪ observations, ▪ interviews, ▪ informal meetings Longitudinal 3 interviews/ student in 18 months	13 (7 out of 13 are Chn. Ss)	New Zealand
Motivation to learn English (Li, 2006)	Interview Longitudinal 2 points/ year		UK
Migration ▪ motivation ▪ education and family backgrounds ▪ present conditions and aspirations	Survey	280	Australia
Reasons why Chinese students choose Australia (Mazzarol et al., 2001)	▪ Literature review ▪ Survey		Australia
why Chinese students chose to study in New Zealand (Malcolm, Ling, & Sherry, 2004)	Questionnaire	172	New Zealand
role of self-determined motivation and goals for study abroad in the adaptation (Chirkov et al., 2007)	<u>Study 1:</u> ▪ Self-Regulation Questionnaire—Study Abroad (SRQ—SA) ▪ Goals for studying abroad: The Reasons for Emigration Scale (Tartakovsky & Schwartz, 2001) ▪ The outcome measures ▪ Subjective well-being (SWB) <u>Study 2:</u> ▪ SRQ—SA ▪ Goals for studying abroad: SRQ-A (Ryan & Connell) ▪ Motivation for acculturation scale ▪ the Self-Regulation Questionnaire—Academic (SRQ—A) ▪ WB indicators: The Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985) ▪ Socio-cultural adjustment indicators Comparison	▪ Study 1: 122 ▪ Study 2: 98	▪ Belgium ▪ Canada
Dimensions of difficulties	▪ In-depth interviews	10	US

Theme of the topics	Methods	No. of Student	Host country
(Sun & Chen, 1999)			
General experiences (Gu, 2009)	<u>Study I:</u> ■ Interview ■ Questionnaire <u>Study II:</u> ■ Investigation ■ Interview <u>Study III:</u> ■ Questionnaire ■ Case study Longitudinal: 3 (before arrival, soon after arrival, 6 months) Comparison	<u>Study I:</u> ■ 13 Chn. S. +10 UK.T*** ■ 163 Chn. S. <u>Study II:</u> ■ 10 Chn. S. ■ UK.Tutor <u>Study III:</u> ■ 245 Chn. S. ■ 10 Chn.S.	UK
■ Educational objectives ■ Attitudes to assessment methods (Selvarajah, 2006)	Comparison	■ 71 Chn. S. ■ 19 NZ. S. ■ 5 Others	New Zealand
Life Satisfaction (Pan et al., 2008)	<u>Scale:</u> ■ Acculturative Stressor Scale for Chinese Students ■ Chinese Personal Meaning Profile ■ Life satisfaction. <u>Interview</u> Comparison	206	Australia
■ New Zealand as a study destination ■ Educational experiences and study pathways ■ Life satisfaction and challenges (Ho et al., 2007)	■ Interview ■ Focus group	83	New Zealand
Differences in Living and Learning (Zhang & Brunton, 2007)	Questionnaire ■ Levels of satisfaction about their sociocultural and educational experiences	140	New Zealand
Cultural identity (Ding, 2009)	■ Self-discovery ■ Interviews	4	UK
Gambling (Li, Hodgetts, & Ho, 2006)	Interview	12	New Zealand
Holiday behaviours (Ryan & Zhang, 2007)	<u>Qualitative:</u> Interview <u>Quantitative:</u> New Zealand International Visitors' Survey (Ryan & Xie, 2003)	■ 10 ■ 158	New Zealand
Individual and Cultural Gender Roles (Leung & Moore, 2003)	Bem Sex Role Inventory (Bem, 1974) Comparison	■ 418 Aus. S ■ 172 Chn.	Australia
Name Change and Acculturation (Kang, 1971)	■ Socialization ■ Economic activities ■ Social control	118	US
Migration how the students and their organizations negotiated the changing stance of the Australian government towards asylum seekers, and the way in which the students harnessed resources in the campaign (Gao, 2009)	Multi-method ■ empirical basis, ■ drawing on documentary sources ■ participant observation ■ qualitative interviews	132	Australia
Migration intentions (Lu, Zong, & Schissel, 2009)	Survey	160	Canada

Theme of the topics	Methods	No. of Student	Host country
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Cultural values ▪ Attitudes and perceptions towards various marketing stimuli (Lowe & Corkindale, 1998) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Questionnaire Comparison 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 114 Aus. S. 126 Chn. S 	Australia
Employment (James & Otsuka, 2009)	Interview		Australia
Psychological correlates of eating problems (Davis & Katzman, 1999)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Eating Disorder Inventory (Garner, Olmsted & Garfinkel, 1983), ▪ Center for Epidemiologic Studies of Depression (Radloff, 1977), ▪ Index of Self Esteem (Hudson, 1982) ▪ Suinn-Lew Acculturation Scale (Suinn et al., 1987) 	197	US

*To find details of the scale or instrument utilized please refer to the original research. The reference of this thesis does not cover the information.

**Chn. S—Chinese students; US. S—American students

*** UK.T—British teacher

**** Table is compiled by the author.

Appendix 5: Questionnaire (translated in English)

Questionnaire (Phase I)

October 5, 2010

Dear students,
my name is Jiani Zhu. I am a doctoral student at the Humboldt-Universität of Berlin (http://www2.hu-berlin.de/aks/home_JZ.html), and the topic of my thesis is “Chinese students’ academic adjustment at German universities”. I would kindly ask you to participate in the questionnaire, which is composed of three parts: your academic background, motivation and your personal information. The research is purely for research purpose and your answers will be kept confidential. It takes about 10-15 minutes to finish the questionnaire. Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me zhujiani.berlin@gmail.com.

Sincerely,
Jiani Zhu

Academic background

1. Majors: _____;
2. The consistence of your previous major in China and current major in Germany
(1) inconsistent (2) almost consistent (3) consistent
3. What university degree have you achieved in China?
(1) junior college degree (2) bachelor (3) master (4) doctoral
(5) junior college degree student (6) bachelor student (7) Master student
(8) doctoral student (9) others
4. What degree you are pursuing in Germany?
(1) bachelor (2) master (3) doctoral (4) visiting scholar (5) exchange student
(6) others
5. The language of your program at German university
(1) German (2) English (3) German and English

Language

1. According to your current foreign language level, how do you expect your ability in using the German language at the university? (Please rate from “1” poor to “5” excellent).

		1	2	3	4	5
German	Listening: Understanding the lecturers					
	Speaking: Participating in the discussion					
	Reading: Reading academic books					
	Writing: Homework or semester paper					
	Comprehensive: Comm. with lecturers/classmates					

English	Listening: Understanding the lecturers					
	Speaking: Participating in the discussion					
	Reading: Reading academic books					
	Writing: Homework or semester paper					
	Comprehensive: Comm. with lecturers/classmates					

2. According to your current foreign language level, how do you expect your ability in dealing with the daily situation? (Please rate from “1” poor to “5” excellent).

	1	2	3	4	5
to express oneself at the daily communication					
to understand daily communication					
to read post and letter in German					
to read newspaper/ magazines					

3. Have you attended any German language test?

- (1) Yes, TestDaF: TDN 5 (2) Yes, TestDaF: TDN 4
(3) Yes, TestDaF: TDN 3 (4) Yes, DSH: DSH-3
(5) Yes, DSH: DSH-2 (6) Yes, DSH: DSH-1
(7) Yes, but I haven't passed (8) No, not yet

Knowledge about Germany and German universities

1. How much do you know about German universities and German society? (Please rate from “1” is poor to “5” is excellent) (Please rate from “1” poor to “5” excellent).

		Poor				Excellent
		1	2	3	4	5
German universities	Academic resources					
	Academic tasks					
	Examinations					
	Types of courses					
German society	Daily life					
	Society, culture and custom					
	Political, economic and historical information					

2. How do you know the above information

- (1) Message or post on internet forum
(2) Consulting Chinese students studied/studying in Germany
(3) Homepage of the German University (4) German Course
(5) German friends (6) Other
(7) Haven't searched yet

Motivation of studying in Germany

What is your motivation of studying in Germany (multiple choices)

- (1) To pursue academic knowledge
- (2) To improve the foreign (German) language skills
- (3) To obtain an overseas degree
- (4) Exchange program is available
- (5) To experience the teaching-learning environment abroad
- (6) To obtain better learning environment
- (7) To gain the research experience
- (8) More courses are available at foreign university
- (9) More academic freedom is available
- (10) Others

Personal profile

- (1) Sex ____; (2) Age ____; (3) University _____ ;
- (4) Scholarship student or self-funded student _____ ;
- (5) Is there any one in your family or friends circle has ever studied or worked in Germany?
- (6) Have you been to Germany before?
- (7) Is the current program you are attending a cooperation program between China and Germany?
- (8) How long have you been to Germany?

Thank you for your cooperation!

Questionnaire (Phase II)

October 25, 2011

Dear students,
my name is Jiani Zhu. I am a doctoral student at the Humboldt-Universität of Berlin (http://www2.hu-berlin.de/aks/home_JZ.html), and the topic of my thesis is “Chinese students’ academic adjustment at German universities”. Thank you very much for participating in the first round of the questionnaire last year, I would kindly ask you to participate in the second round (last round), which is composed of several parts: German language skills, knowledge about Germany and German universities, daily communication, and achievement. The research is purely for research purpose and your answers will be kept confidential. It takes about 10-15 minutes to finish the questionnaire. Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me zhujiani.berlin@gmail.com.

Sincerely,
Jiani Zhu

Language

1. According to your current foreign language level, how do you evaluate your current ability in using the language at German universities? (Please rate from “1” poor to “5” excellent).

		1	2	3	4	5
German	Listening: Understanding the lecturers					
	Speaking: Participating in the discussion					
	Reading: Reading academic books					
	Writing: Homework or semester paper					
	Comprehensive: Comm. with lecturers/classmates					
English	Listening: Understanding the lecturers					
	Speaking: Participating in the discussion					
	Reading: Reading academic books					
	Writing: Homework or semester paper					
	Comprehensive: Comm. with lecturers/classmates					

2. According to your current foreign language level, how do you evaluate your ability in using the German language in the daily situation? (Please rate from “1” poor to “5” excellent).

	1	2	3	4	5
to express oneself at the daily communication					
to understand daily communication					
to read post and letter in German					

2. How are you satisfied with your learning experience in at German universities?
(Please rate from “1” very unsatisfied to “5” very satisfied)

	1	2	3	4	5
In general					
International Office					
Institution					
Lecturer					
Resources					
Teaching/research					

Appendix 6: Interview frameworks/outline

Before arrival

1.1 Background (Academic background, Language background, and Working experience)

1.2 Motivation of studying in Germany (Motivation of choosing the major, going abroad in general, and studying in Germany)

1.3 Applying (Channels, Choosing the universities, Difficulty and duration of application)

1.4 Preparation

1.5 Goal/Plan

Learning experience at German universities

2.1 Forms of academic learning (Lectures, Seminar, Exercises, and Research)

2.2 Tasks of academic learning (Presentation, Reading, Academic Writing, Academic task for doctoral students, Internship)

2.3 Assessment of academic performance

2.3.1 Exams

2.3.2 Thesis

2.4 Special experience

2.5 Academic Support (support provider, content and effect)

2.6 Social support (Reasons and Current situation)

2.7 Effort

2.8 Comment/ Satisfaction with the learning experience

3.1 Intercultural communication

3.1.1 Friends circle

3.1.2 Frequency of intercultural communication

3.2 Daily life (TV & Radio, Hobby/ Entertainment and Social life)